

S E R M O N

O N

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

Containing,

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| I. Of Self-Denial. | VIII. Perfect Love gives Bold- |
| II. The Gospel a Law of Li- | ness in the Day of Judgment. |
| berty. | IX. Loving Christ above all, the |
| III. Of Repentance. | Character of his true Disciples. |
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| Offence. | XII. The Path of the Just, like |
| | the shining Light. |

By *JOHN ABERNETHY*, M. A.

With a LARGE PREFACE,

Containing the

L I F E of the A U T H O R.

In T W O V O L U M E S.

V O L. I.

L O N D O N :

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M. DCC. XLVIII.

SEYMOUR

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS

Containing

- I. Miscellaneous, containing the History of the Christian Church, from its first Institution to the present Time.
- II. The Christian Church, as it is now constituted, and the manner of its Government.
- III. The Christian Church, as it is now constituted, and the manner of its Government.
- IV. The Christian Church, as it is now constituted, and the manner of its Government.
- V. The Christian Church, as it is now constituted, and the manner of its Government.
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M DCC LXXV

P R E F A C E.

IF publishing the following memoirs should appear to need any apology, no apology could be sufficient : But it is hoped, that upon a perusal of them, they will be found not unacceptable. Indeed life, in such a station as that in which Mr. Abernethy was placed, cannot furnish those incidents which are most amusing to the imagination, or which have great influence upon the state of mankind and public affairs : It is the history of a few only, the great and powerful, that gives entertainment of this kind ; but the ingenuous and thinking must be sensible, that in other stations the most illustrious patterns of virtue are often found ; and the man who wants to make his heart better, by surveying human nature in all the finishings of virtuous improvement, and the various methods of discipline, by which the perfection of it is to

be attained, will find his account happily in such lives as that of Mr. Abernethy: It may be very serviceable to all who attentively peruse it, particularly to those, who have chosen the holy ministry for the business of their lives: They will see this station adorned with every thing necessary to render it reputable and useful; one of the soundest minds joined with one of the best of hearts; and a life under the power of the worthiest principles.

HE was the son of Mr. *John Abernethy*, dissenting minister in *Cotraine*. His mother was a daughter of *Walkinshaw* of *Walkinshaw*, in *Renfrewshire* in *Scotland*. He was born *October 19, 1680*, and continued nine years under the care of his parents. In *1689*, he was separated from them, his father being sent by the dissenting ministers to *London*, to sollicite some public affairs; his mother, in the tumult occasioned by the insurrection of the *Irish*, withdrew from her own dwelling to *Derry*. He at this time was with a relation in *Ballymenagh*, who, in that general confusion, determined to remove to *Scotland*; and, having no opportunity of conveying this child to his mother,

mother, carried him along with him. This was the means of his escaping the hardships of the siege of *Derry*, in which Mrs. *Abernethy* lost all her other children. When he had been three years in *Scotland*, which he spent at the grammar-school, he returned to his father's family, then fixed in *Colraine*. Here he continued at school, till he was thirteen, and then was sent to *Glasgow-college*: This he often regretted as an error in the management of his education; seeing however parents might flatter the genius of a child in their own imaginations, it could not be reasonably thought, that he had sufficient knowledge of classical authors, to fit him for academical studies, or that his mind was enough ripened for that reflection, which is necessary to make them successful.

IT may not perhaps be disagreeable to the reader, to mention a very remarkable interposition of providence in preserving his life, when on his way to *Scotland*. At *Belfast*, he was diverting himself with a servant who attended him, upon the great bridge, by which that town is joined to the county of *Down*; they stood upon the bridge

a considerable time; but Mr. *Abernetby* happening to cast his eye upon something at a distance which caught his fancy, they ran off on a sudden; and, the moment they removed, the arch, upon which they had been standing, fell down; so they very narrowly escaped being crushed to pieces.

HE continued at college, till he took the degree of *Master of Arts*: Then his own inclination led him to the study of physic; but he was diverted from this by the advice of his friends, and applied himself to that of divinity; in pursuance of which he went to *Edinburgh*, and was some time under the care of the celebrated professor *Campbel*. Upon his return home, he proceeded in his studies with great success, and was soon taken notice of by the presbytery of *Route*, (of which his father was a member) and, under their direction, went through the usual trials, as a candidate for the ministry. He was licensed to preach, before he was one and twenty. In *June* 1701, he had an invitation to preach in the dissenting congregation at *Antrim*, which was then vacant; and the people, upon hearing him, expressed an inclination to call him
to

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to the pastoral charge; but he resolved, before he settled any where, to spend some time in *Dublin*. He preached in several congregations in the city, particularly that of *Woodstreet*, from which he received an invitation to stay with them some time: This they desired, with an intention of choosing him to the pastoral office, in conjunction with the late Reverend Mr. *Boyse*; but his father's advice, not disagreeable to his own inclinations, determined him to return to the north. He quickly received an unanimous call from the congregation of *Antrim*; but before he was ordained there, his father died; of whom all who knew him, had an high esteem: And a judicious friend, who was intimately acquainted with him, writes thus concerning him: " He
" was an eminent christian, a learned di-
" vine, a vigilant, laborious pastor, a man
" of deep penetration, and solidity of judg-
" ment, of a strength of memory almost
" unparalled, of an extensive public spirit,
" a delicate taste for correct speaking and
" writing, and a man of polite behaviour
" and address."

COLRAINE being vacant by the death of the father, presented a call to the son; so there being a competition between that congregation and *Antrim*, the matter was referred to the general * synod, who gave their decision in favour of *Antrim*, where Mr. *Abernethy* was ordained, *August* 8, 1703. A little after this he married Mrs. *Susannah Jordan*, whose father was dead, and her mother married to *Dominic Heyland*, Esq; of *Castleroe*. Mrs. *Heyland* was a woman of a very uncommon character, much admired, especially for the generosity her spirit and tender affections, and for most exemplary piety. Her daughter *Abernethy* had, with great success, imitated the fair pattern she had every day before her; and Mr. *Abernethy* found himself every way happy in the conjugal relation.

His congregation at *Antrim* was a large one, and he applied himself to the pastoral work

* That is, the yearly meeting of the whole dissenting ministers associated in the North, with a ruling elder for each minister. This, according to their constitution, is the highest church judicatory, to which appeals lie from lesser associations, usually called *Sub-synods*: As to these last, appeals lie from the several *Presbyteries* within their bounds.

work with great diligence. He became much admired for his public performances; and, as his heart was much set upon the acquisition of knowledge, he was very industrious in reading. He was, indeed, the principal life of a society of ministers and candidates in those parts, who, from time to time met, to spend a day in useful conversation, and in communicating their studies; an excellent design, and which was carried on for several years, not without considerable success.

HE was in great esteem with the gentlemen of the first rank in the neighbourhood. The vivacity of his spirit, true wit, so corrected, as to be perfectly consistent with the gravity of his character; an exact purity of manners and good-breeding, recommended him to the best company; and his abilities soon became the subject of general observation to his brethren in the ministry. It may be truly said, that in the general synod, which is a very large association, there was no one more, or as much taken notice of. The greatest respect was paid him from his first appearances, as a person not only of very uncommon genius,

but of admirable wisdom and discretion, of perfect candor and great modesty. He soon became one of those, upon whom the synod most depended in the management of public affairs, and had a very large share in it. As a speaker, he was considered as their greatest ornament: And it is very well known, that he maintained his character and esteem in these respects, through the whole of that tedious course of debates, which afterwards fell in upon the point of christian liberty, even with those, who were the fiercest antagonists to the cause he espoused.

WHEN he had been nine years in *Antrim*, he received a call from the dissenting congregation in *Derry*, who with great earnestness solicited his removal thither. He was, indeed, so generally admired, that it was natural, the most considerable congregations should turn their eyes on him, in case of a vacancy: But this attempt was without success. He thought himself very happy in his situation at *Antrim*, and that the great ends of his ministry might be served as effectually there as any where else. He loved his people, and had a pleasing prospect

spect of success among them. The general synod, when this matter was debated before them, determined his continuance at *Antrim*.

SOON after this, in the year 1712, his wife, by whom he had a son and three daughters, died, which made a very deep and lasting impression upon his mind: He loved her with the greatest tenderness; and, though he bore up under his grief with all possible decency, yet there were plain appearances that it was exceedingly intense. For a considerable time afterwards he chose retirement from the world, as much as it was consistent with the business of his station. But whatever he suffered upon this occasion, it was abundantly compensated, by his apparent growth in knowledge and all virtuous improvements, the best proof, that he knew how to receive affliction, and make the proper use of it.

HE has left behind him a diary of his life, which begins *February*, 1712-13; it makes six large volumes in quarto, very small writing, and very close: It is indeed an amazing work; the temper of his mind all along

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along represented with much exactness; the various events he met with, his reflections upon them, and his improvements of them: The whole bearing such characters of a reverence, and awe of the divine presence upon his mind, of simplicity and sincerity of spirit, and the most careful discipline of the heart, that, how great soever his reputation in the world was, it shews its real worth rather exceeded it.

THIS diary begins with a review of his past life, even from childhood, and a very careful examination of the present moral state of his mind; which takes up many pages, and is too long to be here inserted. But it discovers a spirit thoroughly sensible of the importance of religion, fully convinced of the truth and divine authority of the religion of Christ, and in calling himself to an account, not only impartial but severe. He searches narrowly into his own defects, and writes like one that wrote only for himself, laying open the inmost of his heart. Then he considers the true design of christianity by the knowledge of which we are helped to a right understanding of the terms of our acceptance with God. He
observes

observes that the very essence of faith by which christians are justified, consists in a full consent of soul to the gospel, as containing the will of God for our salvation; and in pursuance of that, a chearful and unreserved submission to the laws of it; the tendency of all which is to purify the heart and life, to deliver men from the spirit of this world, that is, from pride, covetousness and all corrupt desire; to prepare them for the love of God, resignation to him, confidence and delight in him; and for the performance of all good offices to others with undisssembled charity. He observes that the gospel is admirably adapted to answer these ends, not only by the excellency of its laws, but by the love and mercy of God to mankind, and the love of our Saviour, declared in it; by the promises of all necessary divine aid, and of a happy immortality. Then he represents his own sentiments and temper with respect to all these things, and towards the conclusion goes on thus; " I have, after calling upon
" God, reviewed all that I have written
" upon this inquiry; I dare say, in his
" sight, that my soul approves the design
" of the gospel, and heartily concurs with
" it.

“ it. I can say without diffimulation, after
 “ the blessed Psalmist, that *I hate every*
 “ *false way*. I dare no more commit sin
 “ in secret, than if I were in the sight of
 “ the whole world. The deformity of it
 “ appears to my mind loathsome and abo-
 “ minable, and the remaining moral infir-
 “ mities of my soul, which no mortal but
 “ myself can know, are my greatest trouble.
 “ I can say, my heart is determined to the
 “ love of God, and that I choose *the light of*
 “ *his countenance* above all things; that I
 “ love the worship of God as the establish’d
 “ method of maintaining fellowship with
 “ him; that it is habitually my aim to
 “ serve the true ends of religious worship;
 “ and tho’ I often find reason to complain
 “ of myself, yet I can say, I am never easy
 “ or satisfied with that service, in which I
 “ do not find my soul raised to a frame
 “ some way suitable to it, and to some fer-
 “ vor of affection. And as charity is a
 “ character of the true disciples of Christ
 “ often spoken of in scripture, and largely
 “ insisted on by our Saviour, I think, I
 “ can truly say, that the image and like-
 “ ness of God wherever it is found, with-
 “ out regard to party, condition in the
 “ world,

“ world, or any other consideration, is the
“ object of my sincere affection ; my heart
“ would be glad to do a good office to a
“ disciple in the name of a disciple, and to
“ do good, as I have opportunity, to all
“ mankind. What then upon the whole
“ shall I conclude ? That, according to the
“ gospel declarations, I am in a state of
“ favour with God ? Yes, I will, and must
“ do it. Surely these are the genuine cha-
“ racters of it, according to the scriptures.
“ Therefore condemning myself for mani-
“ fold past offences, and adoring the rich
“ mercy of God, I will say to my soul,
“ that I am the object of his approbation
“ and love.” Concluding all with praises
and thanksgiving in most affectionate strains,
and with resolutions of conducting his life
for the future so as to please and honour
God : particularly with respect to his
business as a minister, of the dignity and
importance of which he expresses a high
sense, and great pleasure in it, with earnest
desires that he may, by the assistances of
God’s holy spirit, be enabled to answer the
true ends of that honourable station.

IT will, I am persuaded, be agreeable to many readers, to have some farther account of this record of his life, and his progress in cultivating good affections, and correcting whatsoever appeared amiss. But the design of this preface does not admit of following him through the particulars of this kind, which would swell it to a very great bulk. All that can be expected, is, a general view of the designs which he pursued, and his great application to serve them; to which it will not be improper to subjoin some few passages which shall be faithfully transcribed, that the reader may be able to form a just idea of his spirit. There are indeed very many which there is no occasion to insert here, for they contain his reasonings with himself upon religious subjects, and these are to be found in his sermons, where they are set in the best light.

THE discipline of the heart, is the great business which he appears in the whole of this diary to have pursued. His inquiries upon particular occasions into his own infirmities and defects, are very frequent. He relates the workings of his passions,
those

those especially, which he apprehended had the ascendant in his natural complexion and temper, and by which he was in the greatest danger of being betrayed into errors in conduct, with much exactness, and many useful reflections upon them; with great care applying himself to find out the *deceitfulness of sin*, and to discover that false colouring of principles and affections, which frequently imposes upon the unthinking and partial, and under the cover of which, bad dispositions and actions often shelter themselves, indeed are recommended as virtuous. And as he was at pains to fortify himself by all proper means, against whatsoever might endanger that exact integrity which was the subject of his constant attention and care, so where he was conscious of having failed in any instance, he does particularly record it, and his exercise of repentance for it. And where he had acted his part happily, and approved himself to his own heart, this is likewise set down, with proper reflections for his encouragement and establishment in virtue. Never sure was there a scene where the various workings of the human heart, and the proper discipline of it, are more fully and affectingly display'd.

He

He likewise frequently compares the present state of his mind, with what it was in times past, carefully observing, whether he made advances in religion and virtue, or was falling beneath former attainments; and, as he was for some years labouring under frequent depression of spirit, tho' concealed from the world, his conflicts with imagination, while it distressed him, and his reasonings with himself for his support and encouragement, are all set forth very particularly.

BUT there is nothing he attended to with greater exactness, than the manner and temper in which he performed the public services of religion. The examining of these appears to have been part of his business every sabbath-evening; and in the reflections made upon such occasions, the simplicity of his spirit in pursuing the true ends of religion and the ministry, and his ardent zeal, do most affectingly appear. He expresses great displeasure with himself, when vain or unreasonable thoughts had insinuated themselves so, as to lessen or interrupt his attention to divine things; or when he had not those feelings of devout affection, and of
love

love to, and concern for the flock to whom he ministred, which he laboured above all things to preserve upon his mind. But he often reviews these services with great satisfaction and pleasure, expressing much joy in the exercise of the best affections and confidence of divine acceptance. In one part of the diary he concludes his reflections with these words: " The great difference I
" find in my mind, as to clearness and con-
" fusion of thought, sometimes seized with
" such languor and indisposition, such stu-
" pidity and barrenness, I can have no dis-
" tinct perceptions, I cannot think with
" any relish; at other times I find such
" surprising vigour and freedom of spirit,
" such strongly affecting views of those
" things, which before were covered with
" thick darkness, and this attended with
" the greatest pleasure, that I seem to my-
" self quite another person; this difference,
" I say, I cannot account for. I know not
" the dependance the soul has upon the
" body, and how far the temper of the
" one may be affected by the state of the
" other; but for the mind itself, surely
" such changes do not depend upon choice,
" or

“ or an act of the will, here another cause
 “ must be acknowledged.”

BESIDES the daily services of the closet, it appears from his diary, that he frequently shut himself up the whole day, which he spent in prayer, reading the scriptures, and religious meditation. These days he often marks, as very entertaining and useful to him; and the exercises of his mind, with respect to the state of his own soul, that of his family, his congregation, and the public interest, are all set down, in which such a spirit of piety and charity breathes, as is rarely to be met with.

THE reader will, I believe, be pleased with an account of the reasons of his spending so much time in the secret exercises of devotion, in his own words, which are as follow: “ I have resolved to set apart this
 “ day for the solemn exercises of devotion;
 “ not that I place religion in such things,
 “ for certainly it consists in a conformity of
 “ the habitual disposition of the mind to
 “ the will of God, and an uniform tenor
 “ of conversation. When I was a child in
 “ religion (that is, beginning to be serious)
 “ many

“ many a danger I was exposed to, particu-
“ larly that of being imposed upon by a
“ warm imagination, laying too great stress
“ upon what I accounted divine impressions,
“ upon fervours and raptures in religion :
“ This, I believe, some young and unex-
“ periened christians are apt to fall into ;
“ but true christianity consists in love to
“ God, and charity to men, which is the
“ *bond of perfectness* : It consists in doing
“ justly, and loving mercy ; in meekness
“ patience, and contentment. O ! my soul !
“ endeavour to grow in these virtues, that
“ is the sure way of pleasing God ; and it
“ is essentially necessary to real religion, that
“ a design of pleasing God, be constantly
“ and uniformly pursued ; whenever that is
“ neglected, sincerity is lost. But I apply
“ myself to these exercises, *first*, because
“ they are a noble employment of the mind,
“ most worthy of its rational powers ; tend-
“ ing to their highest perfection, and af-
“ fording most solid joy : *Secondly*, in so-
“ lemn transactions with God, I may hope
“ for such a confirmation in virtuous senti-
“ ments and dispositions ; and such advan-
“ tages over worldly lusts, as may be of
“ great use to me in future life ; and this

“ hope is justified by experience. *Thirdly,*
 “ I would lay stricter obligations upon my-
 “ self to greater watchfulness and caution
 “ against the springs of error, and perplexi-
 “ ty, and guilt, into which I have been
 “ formerly misled, and my life rendered un-
 “ comfortable.”

To all which it may be added, that to his conversing so much with himself, and these extraordinary labours in the closet, were, no doubt, in a great measure owing, not only the uncommon goodness of his spirit, and the exact regularity and usefulness of his life; but that intimate acquaintance with the human heart, and those amazing strains of reasoning, which appear in his sermons, which could be the effect of nothing but the closet, application to thinking, and the most careful attention to his own mind.

BESIDES all this, he gives an account, in his diary, of several alterations of opinion in religious matters, and has been very particular in the reasons of them; and upon what principles he embraced some opinions, contrary to what he had formerly received;
 and

and in several places sets down his reasonings upon the importance of various articles of faith, as they affect the christian life.

One of these passages concludes thus:

“ My mind has been often disturbed about
“ some particular points of orthodoxy; but I
“ am persuaded, with that measure of know-
“ ledge God has given me (little, when
“ compared with the attainments of others)
“ no mistake about the christian truth will
“ deprive me of acceptance, unless, which
“ I hope is not my case, it arises from sel-
“ fish irregular desires, opposing the design
“ of christianity itself: And the most sub-
“ stantial enjoyment, conformable to the
“ scope of the gospel, is that sincere satis-
“ faction, which results from a true dispo-
“ sition, to fall in with it universally.”

IT has been already observed, that his diary contains an account of all the important events that beset him, with his reflections upon them; his own resolutions and the principles upon which he founded them. In these things he has descended very minutely, and made many observations upon his own schemes in life, and the many disappointments he met with, which tended

to make his heart better, and to work in him a more finished resignation to the will of God. Upon occasion of a considerable disappointment, he writes thus: " A dis-
" passionate temper of spirit is that only
" which will afford me solid peace. When
" passions of any kind prevail, they de-
" prive me of comfort, they marr my best
" services to God; I go about my duty in
" bitterness, and the heat of my spirit,
" which I have sometimes lately found; I
" ought therefore to summons all my power
" to bear them down. Lord, assist me by *the*
" *spirit of power, and of love, and of a*
" *sound mind*; and let me ever guard against
" vain carnal thoughts, the delusive images
" of pleasure, profit, or honour, and against
" dissatisfaction with my present state; all
" these tend to break in upon the sincerity
" and tranquillity of my soul. Let me now
" put the question; what would I do, if
" my circumstances were altered, according
" to the imaginations that have often
" amused me? I answer to myself, I would
" apply myself chearfully to my business,
" as a christian and a minister, studying
" higher degrees of knowledge, purity,
" meekness, charity, and every thing vir-

" tuous

" tuous and praise-worthy. But am I not
 " deceiving myself in this? I cannot vindi-
 " cate myself from such delusion other-
 " wise, than by promoting those ends *now*
 " to the utmost of my capacity. If I do
 " not do it *now* to my utmost, I should not
 " do it *then*; for a mere change in the out-
 " ward state will never make the heart bet-
 " ter. If I am impatient that things do
 " not come to pass according to my fond
 " desire, and sanguine imaginations, that is
 " my sin; and if such impatience of spirit
 " diverts me from my duty, it is a certain
 " indication of insincerity in my profession
 " as a christian."

To conclude this general account of his
 diary, there runs through it a tender spirit
 of sympathy with his friends: Many of their
 distresses are particularly represented, and
 the feelings of his heart, on their account,
 which shew a very delicate sensibility in
 such matters, and made him always ready
 to do his utmost for their support and relief.
 With such variety of matter, omitting no-
 thing that was of any importance, he car-
 ried on the history of his life, which, tho'
 manifestly intended for his own use only,

and therefore written with the greatest simplicity, yet discovers in every part of it much serious thinking, as well as severe self-government.

THE few passages I have transcribed, in giving the reader this view of the design of it, are in the first or second volumes; I shall now add some of his meditations many years after.

“ UPON a designed consideration of those
 “ important subjects, the methods of di-
 “ vine providence towards me, my own
 “ behaviour, what I ought to do, and how
 “ support myself under the calamities of
 “ life, and the fears of death (and, for such
 “ consideration, I have a good opportunity
 “ this Lord’s day, being detained from the
 “ public assembly by such an indisposition,
 “ as does not render me incapable of me-
 “ ditating) a great many thoughts arise in
 “ my heart. It is of the last consequence,
 “ indeed the foundation of all religion, and
 “ all comfort, to preserve right sentiments
 “ concerning the Deity and his providence.
 “ I have given my heart free leave to bring
 “ forth all its objections (and they all turn
 “ upon

“ upon this one point, that they seem to
“ argue against the wisdom and kindness
“ of providence to me) for surely the prin-
“ ciples of religion are not such, as to re-
“ quire that any objections against them
“ should be stifled, as being too strong.
“ The sum of my deliberate thoughts, af-
“ ter a serious enquiry, are, that if in-
“ deed the gratifications of sense, of ani-
“ mal affections and passions, be the per-
“ fection and true end of life, I am not
“ able to answer the objection; for, though
“ it is certain, I have many good things
“ from God (and, I am persuaded, there
“ is more of them, than evil in my lot;
“ and, it may be, the enjoyments I would
“ further desire, might be hurtful to life
“ upon the whole) yet I cannot say, that
“ this amounts to a satisfying answer. But
“ taking life in another view, and confi-
“ dering the human nature, as made for the
“ purposes of virtue and religion, and for
“ the final fruition of God in a perfect
“ state, and the objection vanishes, there is
“ no force at all in it; for then it appears,
“ that the main ends of my being are not ob-
“ structed, but promoted rather, and served,
“ by the very troubles and disappointments
“ complained

“ complained of, as experience fully de-
 “ monstrates: But that this is a true prin-
 “ ciple, is apparent, from a fair view of all
 “ the powers, affections, and enjoyments of
 “ our nature, taken together; for virtuous
 “ sentiments, and affections, and enjoyments,
 “ are so deep wrought into our constitu-
 “ tion, that it is impossible to efface them.
 “ To resist and strive continually against
 “ them, is to make ourselves compleatly
 “ miserable; whereas, to resist the other
 “ affections and passions, affords inward se-
 “ renity and peace; so that, upon the con-
 “ trary principle to that which I now as-
 “ sert, the human nature would be an un-
 “ accountable work of God, a heap of ab-
 “ surdities and contradictions, like *the sha-*
 “ *dow of death*, without any light or or-
 “ der. But this principle must lie at the
 “ bottom of all religion, and, I hope, I
 “ need not still be laying the foundation
 “ from it, as I am satisfied concerning the
 “ dispensations of divine providence toward
 “ me, so I see my own faults, which con-
 “ sist principally in opposing and thwarting
 “ it, setting my heart on those things, as
 “ the principal business and fruitions of life
 “ which really are not so; and, upon this
 “ wrong

“ wrong ground, conducting my passions,
“ imaginations, and endeavours: If this be
“ my error, return, my soul, to the con-
“ trary disposition and practice from all thy
“ projects and counsels, and conduct all
“ thy affairs by this one principle, *that re-*
“ *ligious virtue is the true end, and the*
“ *highest enjoyment of life*; so shalt thou
“ possess equanimity in all events; so shalt
“ thou enjoy thy own existence with com-
“ fort; so shalt thou be able to suppress
“ tumultuous desires, perplexing fears, and
“ discouraging griefs, the scandals, weak-
“ nesses, vices, and torments of nature.

IN another place, with respect to the christian religion, he writes thus; “ Many
“ are the objections that are raised against
“ christianity. Sometimes they are started
“ in my mind very unseasonably, and tend
“ to beget an indifference to, and a disrelish
“ of the gospel scheme: This certainly
“ must be got over, otherwise I can never
“ enter into christian exercises with that
“ spirit, and those affections, that become
“ me. Still, it must be acknowledged that
“ since it pleased God to reveal his will to
“ men, he treats them as men; and allows
“ them

“ them the free use of their understanding
“ in examining it, to distinguish between
“ true and false, and to form a right judg-
“ ment of what is contained in his word.
“ But the foundations upon which I have
“ received christianity always appear to my
“ most deliberate thoughts concerning them,
“ firm and unshaken. I am perfectly sen-
“ sible they have often appeared so in the
“ freest exercise of all my rational powers,
“ and in the greatest, most dispassionate
“ serenity of mind. This farther I am sure
“ of, that my most exalted sentiments of
“ virtue and moral perfection, I have been
“ led into from a contemplation of the
“ rules, views, and motives of the gospel.
“ And tho’ there be some representations
“ and forms of speaking hard to be ac-
“ counted for, yet the most important
“ points, particularly the nature of future
“ rewards, as consisting in the perfection of
“ virtue, are declared according to truth, and
“ the nature of things. The design of
“ Christ’s coming into the world, his dying,
“ rising, ascending into heaven, (not as
“ darkened by mens explanations and hy-
“ potheses, but in the simplicity in which
“ these points are declared in the New
“ Testament)

“ Testament) are amazing effects of Phi-
“ lanthropy. And the gift of the holy
“ spirit, as represented in the scripture, so
“ far from being any way shocking and ab-
“ iurd, I own, it appears to me most
“ worthy of God, and a most beautiful
“ part of the scheme. When all these
“ things are considered, I am perfectly sa-
“ tisfied. I consent to the gospel covenant.
“ I find the greatest prejudices against it at
“ bottom, arise from the vanity of my own
“ heart, and the depravity of my affections.
“ I therefore willingly go again to the
“ knowledge of Christ, that I may learn
“ virtue, and upon the same foundation on
“ which I have begun, and by the same
“ means, to carry on a war against sin. My
“ irregular appetites, my selfish passions,
“ have even of late been very vexatious,
“ and providence has interposed very re-
“ markably to controul them. Let dis-
“ content, anger, the love of the things of
“ this world, pride, with all fantastic and
“ unnatural affections, be hated and
“ opposed. And as I am weak, Lord,
“ strengthen me by thy holy spirit, that so
“ the vigour of my mind may be preserved,
“ and I may every day, and by the con-
“ tinued

"tinued use of prayer, meditation, and
 "every ordinance of God, be aspiring to
 "integrity. If I be thus seeking glory and
 "immortality, eternal life (for what is eter-
 "nal life, what is heaven, but the integrity
 "and perfection of nature?) is mine. And
 "how little ought this world to seem in
 "my account? How little should I regard
 "men and their behaviour towards me? O
 "that the blessed Jesus were more in my
 "esteem, and I endeavouring to walk even
 "as he walked. I repent of my former
 "follies, and I turn to the Lord with all
 "my heart.

AGAIN, "God has not framed the
 "human nature so as to be necessarily mise-
 "rable. Nay, such is our constitution, that
 "the greatest comfort, the noblest enjoy-
 "ment, arises from our acting agreeably to
 "it. That is, from doing constantly, and
 "uniformly, what our minds approve. One
 "would think, now, here is an easy and
 "ready way to be happy. But indeed the
 "doing our duty, acting a reasonable part,
 "conforming our practice to the deliberate
 "sentiments which are the result of an im-
 "partial inquiry, is rendered difficult by
 "our

“ our vehement appetites and tumultuous
“ passions, which darken the mind, per-
“ plex its counsels, dissipate its vigour,
“ and, as I often find by experience, pre-
“ cipitate men into a rash and sinful conduct.
“ Yet I find no necessity laid upon me to
“ be hurried in that manner, and driven by
“ the brutal impulse of the mechanical
“ part of nature. It is in an unhappy
“ choice, and in the prevalence of corrupt
“ affections, that the guilt consists. How
“ wonderfully is the glorious gospel suited
“ to this excellent design of raising the
“ mind above all servitude to appetites and
“ passions, and of giving life and spirit in
“ the performance of duty? There is the
“ promise of pardon to be the foundation
“ of our dutiful return to God, when we
“ are conscious of having offended him.
“ There is a promise that sin shall not have
“ dominion. The assistance of the holy
“ spirit is offered. Virtue is recommended
“ by a plain and easily intelligible law, en-
“ forced by a very powerful sanction. I
“ do, therefore, betake myself to the re-
“ medy the gospel has provided for me; I
“ lay hold of the great salvation. I have
“ indeed for many years professed to do so;
“ but

“ but have not made the progress might
“ have been expected over sin. I therefore
“ bemoan myself, but what shall I do? I
“ must renew my application to the grace of
“ Christ. I consent to the gospel covenant;
“ engaging myself, anew, in the strength
“ of God to perform all the duties it re-
“ quires, and to oppose all sin, those sins
“ especially, which I have found warring
“ against my own soul. And, O! my
“ soul, return to thy rest, to a quiet resignation
“ to the will of God, to a firm confidence
“ in him, and a cheerful acquiescence in
“ his providence, return to meekness, purity,
“ and charity.

THIS is all that I shall transcribe from the diary, excepting what is necessary to give the reader a just view of Mr. *Abernethy's* reasonings with himself upon some important turns of life, and the principles upon which his resolutions were founded. To proceed with the account of his life.

HIS behaviour as the head of a family, was, in all respects, exemplary. Besides the daily regular worship of God in it (a matter in which he was very exact himself, and which

which with the greatest zeal he recommended to others, accounting it one great cause of the decay of religion, so justly complained of in the present age, that family worship was so much neglected) he set a part a day, from time to time, several hours of which he spent with his family, instructing his children and servants, and praying with them. And he had the testimony of all in his house, and of all the neighbourhood, to the great meekness of his spirit, the evenness of his temper, and a generous affectionate care of all that were under his roof.

IT may be reckoned amongst his more private labours, that every fortnight, for several years, he spent a day with the members of his session, or (as it is sometimes called) consistory, and as many of the principal persons in the congregation, as were disposed to attend such service, in prayer and conversation upon useful subjects. Many of these have spoken frequently of it since, as what was of great advantage to them. Several points in christianity, which are less obvious to the unlearned, were freely discoursed upon, and every man had opportunity of proposing his difficulties. But the

conversation always turned principally upon matters relating to practice, and which might tend to edification.

In the public service he followed the rules then usually observed in the north; Expounding some portion of scripture, and preaching twice every Lord's day. On wednesday he always preached a sermon; after which he spent some time in conversing with the members of the session, about the state of the congregation; and inquiring into any public scandals, which were laid before them, according to the rules of discipline observed amongst the Dissenters, in which he was very exact.

IN the year 1716, in pursuance of a project which had been long in his thoughts, he applied himself to labour among the native *Irish*, in the neighbourhood of *Antrim*, who were (almost universally) of the popish persuasion, to try if their prejudices would be removed, and they might be brought to embrace the protestant religion. His heart was very much set upon the execution of this design; and for a considerable time he managed it alone. He went frequently to
Lough-

Loughside, a place in the neighbourhood, where the greatest numbers of them lived; invited them to public lectures, which were appointed in the most convenient places for their attendance; went from house to house among them, and where they would admit of it, conversed freely with them, labouring to convince them of their errors. When he had continued in this course some time, he had such encouragement from their attendance upon public worship, and the good impressions made upon some of them, that he desired the assistance of the ministers of the neighbourhood in carrying on the design, and with their help continued this attempt for a considerable time. Sermons were frequently preached, and much time spent in private conversation with the *Irish*. There is nothing more frequently taken notice of in his diary than this affair, which he often very warmly and affectionately recommends to the divine care and blessing. Nor did he ever express greater zeal in any thing, than propagating the true protestant principles, and delivering men from papal, and all other ecclesiastical tyranny, together with the unhappy prejudices on the one hand, and ensnaring arts on the other, by which it is

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supported.

supported. His labours among the *Irish* were not without success. Several were prevailed upon and embraced the protestant religion. Some of these did indeed return to the profession of popery ; others continued firm to protestant principles, and gave good evidence of being sincerely religious.

It will appear to the reader from the accounts already given, that Mr. *Abernethy* was a person of unwearied application and diligence. But no one who was not well acquainted with him, could imagine how little time he lost. It appears from his diary, that he very particularly knew the state and character of those who were under his pastoral care. They had always ready access to him. He carefully visited the sick ; and his people had so high an opinion of his wisdom, that in all difficulties and perplexing cases, he was their refuge. He was ready with a most friendly spirit to assist in their counsels, and had a very uncommon dexterity in conducting affairs. He thought it not beneath him to serve the meanest of them, when he had an opportunity of doing good. From this it will be readily concluded

ed that he gave much of his time to his people.

IT is likewise known, that he had, very early in life, a large share in the management of the public affairs and business of the dissenters, and was obliged to be frequently abroad upon that account. His constant attendance at the stated meetings of his brethren took up much time; and, if any thing happened extraordinary that concerned the public interest, he was always called upon as one, upon whose discretion in counsel, and diligence in execution, his brethren had an intire dependance. And it will appear, from the account to be given immediately, that his engagements and business of this kind must be supposed greatly to increase, when the debates concerning the power of the church, and christian liberty, were brought into the synod. He was always looked upon as at the head of that party, which espoused the cause of liberty, and had a principal share in conducting the counsels of his friends, with respect to the public debates: In the business of their private societies, he laboured with great diligence, wrote many

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papers

papers himself upon the controverted points, several of which were published, and assisted in those which were published by his friends.

BUT besides all this, he made very great progress in learning: The reader will perceive, from the account of his education already given, that he was too much hastened in it; but he laboured afterwards with such application, that there were few branches of learning, to which he could be called a stranger. He had a taste for the classics, and understood them; and used to recommend the study of them very warmly to young candidates. He had carefully read the best systematical writers in divinity, and was skilful in their controversies. He was well acquainted with church history; understood the modern improvements in philosophy, and was not a stranger to the various hypotheses of the antients. He was thoroughly versed in the principles of natural religion and morality, and had made the principal authors, both antient and modern, upon these arguments, perfectly familiar to him: His knowledge in these matters best appears, from the sermons he published

lished upon the divine attributes, which have been so well received in the learned world, that it is unnecessary to say any thing concerning them.

BUT above all things, he applied himself to the study of the holy scriptures; his thorough acquaintance with which, the reader will see in the perusal of his sermons: No man could be more happy in pertinent quotations from them; or in explaining the more difficult and controverted passages, comparing texts together, and casting light upon them, by reasoning from the undoubted principles of religion, in which he had a great dexterity.

BUT while he was thus employed in the north, and had acquired a very high reputation, he was, in the year 1717, invited by the congregation of protestant dissenters at *Usher's Quay* in *Dublin*, to be their pastor, in conjunction with the late reverend Mr. *Arbuckle*, then their sole pastor. This affair gave him much trouble. He had contracted a very great affection for his people in *Antrim*, and had seen his labours among them successful. He highly esteemed the

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society

society of ministers in that neighbourhood, and was inexpressibly dear to them: It was his own opinion, that he was capable of serving the great purposes of christianity, and of the dissenting interest in *Antrim*, as effectually as he could in any other situation; and thought it extremely hard, that any minister should be removed by mere dint of the authority of a synod, contrary the judgment of his own mind. The affair was long depending, and took several turns, but at the last came to a decision by the general synod, in 1718.

AT that time the congregation in *Belfast*, usually called the *Old Congregation*, wanted a minister; the reverend Mr. *John Macbride*, their pastor, was then in a declining state, and unable to go through the ministerial services; so that congregation, while the affair of *Usher's Quay* was depending, invited Mr. *Abernethy*: And many imagined, that, if he was obliged to leave *Antrim*, it would be more agreeable to him to fix in *Belfast* than *Dublin*; and some thought it would be more serviceable to the common interest. The general synod, af-
ter

ter a long debate among the parties, one for his going to *Dublin*, another for *Belfast*, and a third for his remaining at *Antrim*, came to a determination in favour of the first.

MR. *ABERNETHY* now found himself in a good deal of perplexity; he was exceedingly dear to the congregation of *Antrim*, and they to him: His own judgment was, that his removal was like to be hurtful, rather than serviceable to the public interest of the dissenters: At the same time a great regard had been always shown to synodical decisions; and there was apparent danger of incurring great inconveniences, by acting in direct contradiction to them. The synod had appointed his removal to *Dublin* in three months; during this time, he had frequent consultations with his friends: Many urged him to comply with the synod, and had frightful apprehensions of the consequences of such an act of disobedience to their authority, as his continuing at *Antrim* must be. That authority had been generally esteemed indisputable, and any thing that was like to weaken, much more to bring it into contempt,

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was look'd upon with great jealousy: Others, convinced that the part the synod had acted, was an unjust stretch of power, were clear for his following his own judgment in the disposal of himself. The result of his counsels was, to determine nothing finally for the present, and to shew so much respect to the synodical decision, as to pay a visit to the congregation of *Usher's Quay*, and stay three months with them, that he might have a full view of the state of things in *Dublin*, and come to a conclusion in his own mind, upon the best and most impartial inquiry he could make. In pursuance of this resolution he went to *Dublin*, and, after three months stay, returned to *Antrim*, with a fixed resolution of continuing there. As this was the most remarkable instance, in which the power of the general synod was resisted, so he saw it necessary, that he should be thoroughly satisfied concerning the grounds upon which he went into a measure, to the generality so very unpopular, to many provoking, and, in the account of some, directly criminal. Many of his reasonings with himself upon this subject, are written in his diary, in which, after comparing the arguments for
and

and against his removal, and balancing all things that could be suggested, he concludes thus : “ I have all the encouragement I can
“ well expect, in the present state of the
“ churches, to continue where I am ; I labour among an affectionate people, and
“ not without hope of success : I am perfectly satisfied, God has blessed me in my ministrations here: I have work enough,
“ and that of the most public nature ; I can attend any where : My much esteemed
“ brethren in the neighbourhood, who have the interest of the gospel, and the cause of christian liberty at heart, press my continu-
“ ance among them, to join in the happy work in which they are engaged ; and, I
“ am convinced, that in this church particularly, and at this time, it both needs,
“ and is worthy of all the assistance I can give. These arguments prevail, and the
“ main force of the other (*viz.* for his removal) depends upon servile notions of ecclesiastical power, which are attended
“ with confusion and fear, but without light, and they destroy a rational choice.
“ It is my present deliberate and full persuasion, that no synod has any such power,
“ as that of removing a minister from place
“ to

“ to place without his own consent ; and,
 “ I believe, I ought to make a stand against
 “ any such claim. But, O ! that I may
 “ carry with a becoming modesty, and dis-
 “ trust of my own judgment, such as may
 “ keep me always open to conviction,
 “ and the Lord reclaim me when I go
 “ astray.”

THE mention made in this passage of
 the cause of christian liberty, naturally leads
 to some account of the part Mr. *Arbernethy*
 acted in the long continued debates con-
 cerning it in the north, which produced ef-
 fects, at first not at all thought of by the
 contending parties.

HE had very early in life discovered, and
 been very sensible of the pernicious tenden-
 cies of a party spirit in matters of religion,
 and of the tyrannical exercise of ecclesiasti-
 cal power, in what form or constitution
 soever it obtained : He had all along set
 himself against this ; and was, when he had
 opportunity, either in the public ministra-
 tions, or in private, very zealous in recom-
 mending christian charity : This evidently
 appeared to be a favourite subject of dis-
 course

course with him; and he often lamented it, that, when the reformed churches departed from the communion of the church of *Rome*, they carried too much of her spirit along with them. He laboured to open and enlarge the minds of christians, by shewing, that the points, in which the sincere might be supposed to differ, were but of small moment, when compared to the weighty matters, in which all such must necessarily be of one mind.

SOMETIME before the attempt was made, to remove him to *Dublin*, Doctor *Hoadly's* (the present worthy Bishop of *Winchester*) Sermon, upon the kingdom of Christ, with several of the papers, written in the controversy, occasioned by it; particularly, the Bishop's defence against the representation of the committee, were got into the hands of many, and read with great attention, and much pleasure, by the friends of liberty: But by none of them, with more than Mr. *Abernethy*; who used to say, that upon the perusal of these books, he thought he could foresee a glorious day coming, when christians should be joined together, not in the same opinions, but in one heart. As that controversy, by degrees opened, the friends
of

of moderation and liberty, had reason to rejoice in the visible superiority the Bishop had over his antagonists, in point of argument; and many were set a thinking about these matters, who had not much minded them before. A spirit of christian liberty and charity, did very remarkably diffuse itself. And upon this occasion, a considerable number of ministers, and others in the north, formed themselves into a society, much of the same nature, and consisting for most part of the same persons, with that mentioned in the beginning of this preface. Their design was, improvement in useful knowledge; and, in order to that, to bring things to the test of reason and scripture, without a servile regard to any human authority; a design, which must be approved by all men of candor, as a good one, and which could not but be very friendly, both to the cause of truth and liberty. Mr. *Abernethy* went into this design with much zeal: He constantly attended the meetings of the society (which, as they were frequently in *Belfast*, it being the most central place, these gentlemen came to be called the *Belfast-society*) and no man contributed more to the true ends of it.

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SEVERAL ministers, who at the first were members, did some time after, when the debates concerning ecclesiastical power and christian liberty became very warm, withdraw themselves from the society: The following (afterwards distinguished by the name of non-subscribers) continued to pursue the design of it with much diligence; namely, Dr. *James Kirkpatrick*, and Mr. *Samuel Haliday*, both of *Belfast*; Mr. *Michael Bruce* of *Hallywood*, Mr. *Thomas Nevin* of *Downpatrick*, Mr. *John Mears*, then of *Newtown*, Mr. *Harper*, then of *Moyza*, Mr. *John Henderson* of *Dunane*, Mr. *Thomas Shaw* of *Abghill*, Mr. *William Taylor* of *Carncastle*, Mr. *Josias Clugston* of *Larne*, Mr. *Thomas Wilson* of *Ballyclare*: Of these, Messieurs *Kirkpatrick*, *Haliday*, *Bruce*, *Shaw*, *Taylor* and *Harper*, are since removed by death. As they were Mr. *Abernethy*'s intimate friends, and constant members of the *Belfast*-society, it will not probably be unacceptable to the reader, to give him a short account of their characters.

DR. *KIRKPATRICK* was a person of a very great compass of knowledge: He had

had been in his youth industrious in his studies ; and, with a very quick apprehension, he had a memory so strong and faithful, that he lost very little of what he had read. He was skilful in the languages and classical learning, which he so retained, that to the last, when upwards of sixty, he could speak in the latin tongue with ease and fluency, though his business in life did not call him to any particular care to preserve it. He understood the philosophy, which was taught in the universities at the time he attended his studies in them ; and had made great progress in divinity, especially in the polemic part, in which he was thought to excel. When he appeared in the world as a preacher, he was highly esteemed ; and his thorough knowledge of the presbyterian constitution, and all the rules of that discipline, in which he was very exact, made him very useful to the synod. He all along retained an active temper, and industrious in study : He made himself well acquainted with the late improvements in natural philosophy, and had a genius capable of most considerable advances in any branch of learning ; so that in the decline of life, having applied himself

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to the study of physic, and taken the degree of doctor (which degree he took likewise in divinity) he practised as a physician, several years before his death. He was a most zealous advocate for the just liberties of christians, greatly useful to the *Belfast-society*, and was the author of several papers which they published in their controversies with the general synod. He was of a mind constant and resolved, not to be moved by clamor and importunity, or unjust reproach. He had a very great knowledge of the world, and a good judgment in affairs. He had the interests of religion very much at heart, and upon all proper occasions discovered a most zealous spirit. He was a laborious and constant preacher; but frankly acknowledged to his friends, that he did not bestow much thought or time upon exactness of stile or composition, thinking it enough, if the sentiments were just and plainly expressed, calculated to answer the great ends of preaching, in solemn addresses to the consciences of men. He was a person, through the whole of life, of strict sobriety and temperance. He spoke and argued with much strength and judgment; and was, withal, a

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man of a cheerful spirit, affable and courteous to all, and, upon proper occasions, could entertain and divert his friends with much true humour.

MR. HALYDAY was a gentleman, who had the advantages of a very liberal education, and of spending some years in travelling through *Europe*. He was an excellent scholar, and of a polite taste. He had frequent opportunities of advancing himself another way, but, from mere principle, chose to be a dissenting minister. He was most zealous for the cause of liberty, and a great enemy to all unjust encroachments upon it, under whatsoever pretence. He had studied divinity with diligence, but especially the popish controversies; and, as he thoroughly understood the principles upon which the reformation was founded, so he was very jealous of all appearances of bigotry, and an imposing spirit, as utterly inconsistent with them. His settlement in *Belfast*, which was a little after the debates in the north began, met with considerable opposition from some, who were zealous for what they accounted the just authority of the church, and for the method which had been

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been for some years before pursued, of requiring subscription to the *Westminster confession* of faith from intrants into the ministry. This gave occasion to his writing a book, containing his reasons against the imposition of such subscriptions, which has been thought by many, one of the best books upon that argument. Mr. *Haliday* lived in very great esteem; for, as he had much of the gentleman in his behaviour, so his life and manners were worthy of his character as a minister. He was a person of warm affections, and a very sincere friend. A most correct preacher, but all his discourses were easy and plain: The great principles of practical religion were his main topics, and to serve the true ends of christianity, his constant aim.

MR. *Bruce* was a man of uncommon worth, and as uncommon modesty. He had a clear understanding and sound judgment. No man could argue with greater force, or set things in a stronger, or more convincing light; so that his reasoning was often found quite irresistible, even when his hearers had been strongly and long prejudiced against the truth. He was a principal

manager in the public debates, and was much regarded; for as he was an excellent speaker, so the perfect candor of his spirit, which in the whole of his conduct was so apparent as to raise him quite above suspicion, made him universally beloved: Even the greatest adversaries to his cause could not but admire him. He was of no party farther than his regard to truth and virtue made him of it. He was a great master in natural religion, and in the arguments which support the authority of the christian religion, to which he did great honour by a conversation worthy of it. He was a person quite above the spirit of the world, and seemed to have no solicitude at all about his circumstances in it. No man easier about himself, but the good and benevolent affections so reigned in him, that to do good to others was his constant business and study. And no one manifested a greater reverence for his creator, and care to please him in all things. A fixed persuasion of the perfect wisdom and goodness of God, and that all events are under the direction of his providence, begot such an habitual calm and tranquillity in his mind, that he was not to be shaken ever by most afflicting occurrences.

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He was a most acceptable preacher, and had a wondrous faculty of expressing himself, even upon the most difficult and abstracted subjects, in a manner that was plain and easy to the apprehension of his hearers. And his way of thinking was so clear, and his memory so strong, that tho' he did not write his sermons (which his friends now regret as a very sensible loss) yet he delivered himself in a correct style, and without any confusion. He was capable of rising into great warmth, but the most distant possible from the unreasonable wildnesses of enthusiasm. His strong reasoning, enlivened by the zeal of his spirit, (which never discovered itself but in matters truly important) made deep impressions upon his hearers. It was apparent he felt the power of the sacred truth which he taught: And as he was a man of the greatest simplicity of spirit in declaring the truth, so he was of the greatest firmness in defending it; not to be sway'd by any authority, or daunted by any opposition.

MR. *Taylor* was a man of sound judgment, and very considerable knowledge. He was a weighty speaker, and could mix the argumentative and pathetic very agreeably.

ably. A man of a bold and resolute spirit, and who could not give way to any human authority in religious matters, but followed steadily the conviction of his own judgment. He was a laborious and serious preacher. He bestowed much pains in composing his sermons, and always studied to do honour to his station and character. He maintained a great and firm mind in very afflicting circumstances, which attended an unweildy body, and full of disorders, for many years. This confined him much, and rendered him incapable of those services for which he was in other respects very well qualified. He was much esteemed in the *Belfast* society, and very zealous in their cause.

MR. *Shaw* was a gentleman who could not be known without being beloved. He had an education suitable to his genteel parentage. He had the greatest sweetness and cheerfulness of temper, happily joined with a gravity which became his character, and sat easy upon him. He was much and justly admired for prudence and discretion in his conduct. Not hasty in resolving, and very diligent to satisfy himself thoroughly in the reasons upon which he acted. But
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of a firm mind, and not to be put out of his course, when his reason was convinced. He was formed for friendship, having great generosity, tenderness, purity, and constancy of spirit. He laboured in his work as a minister with much diligence and affectionate concern for his people. His life was, in all respects exemplary. He was the delight of his friends, and could scarcely have an enemy.

MR. *Harper* was distinguished by great piety and tenderness of affection. He had attained to a considerable degree of learning in the languages and philosophy, as well as divinity. His sermons were full of the pathetic, which was natural to him, and without any affectation. He had a delicacy in his temper and passions, which was in some respects uneasy to himself, but amiable to his friends, with whom he rejoiced or suffered, as their circumstances gave occasion, above most men. He had the interests of true religion greatly at heart, and was content to bear personal inconveniencies not a little grievous to him, rather than forsake that party which he believed had truth and reason on their side.

I SAY nothing of messieurs * *Nevin, Wilson, Clugston, Henderson, and Mears,* who

Mr. *Nevin's* death happened since this preface was written. He was a man of great abilities, and indefatigable industry and activity. Exceedingly zealous for the just liberties of mankind, and warm in opposing all pretences to power in matters of religion and conscience. In the course of the debates between the *Synod* and *Nonsubscribers*, a particular charge was brought against him, for some things he had said in private conversation, which were thought inconsistent with some important articles of the christian faith. In the *Synod* which met at *Dungannon*, 1724, the matter was brought to a public trial; and issued, not in a decision upon evidence, but in requiring Mr. *Nevin* to make a declaration of his faith concerning the supreme deity of Christ. This he would not submit to, for many reasons which he urged against such a method of proceeding, as holding an inquisition upon him, and a direct violation of the common rights of mankind: Upon which he was excluded from the *Synod*. The *Nonsubscribers* protested against this, and gave in their reasons, which are printed with Mr. *Nevin's* trial published by himself. His defence, to which the reader is referred, though made under great disadvantages, very much raised his character, even in the *Synod* as well as without doors, shewing great eloquence and strength of reason. He continued, notwithstanding his exclusion, to maintain his reputation amongst his friends at *Downpatrick*; and when the *Nonsubscribers* were erected into a separate Presbytry, became a member with them.

He was an eloquent and acceptable preacher, and delivered himself in the pulpit with great life. He had truly generous dispositions, and was ready to serve his friends at the expence of any labour to himself. As this engaged him in many affairs, so he came to acquire a considerable knowledge in civil matters, and was exceedingly serviceable in the neighbourhood by his advice and

who are still alive. However, it can be no disadvantage to their characters, that they were of this society. As such a set of men, to say the least, is rarely to be met with, so no doubt the methods they pursued in the meetings of their society for mutual improvement, were a great means of their being qualified for the reputable appearance they made in the world, and the important services to which they were called.

MANY had begun very soon to conceive a great jealousy of this society. It was whispered about, that these men aimed at great alteration, in the church. That they had given up some articles of religion which had been looked upon as of great importance, and that they were about to lay aside the *Westminster Confession* of faith (which had been always regarded in the north, with great veneration, and to which from the year 1705, in pursuance of an act of the *Synod*, subscription had been required of intrants

and interest, and by arbitrating in cases referred to him. He bestowed much time and pains in such services, and by degrees became much more involved in business than himself or his friends could have wished, but raised himself to high esteem with persons of rank and distinction in that country.

intrants into the ministry) from being the test of orthodoxy.

It was a custom with the *Belfast* society, at their meetings, to have a sermon preached upon some article of natural, or revealed religion. Mr. *Abernethy*, at their desire, preached one upon *Rom. xiv. 5. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.* In this he explained the rights of private judgment, and the foundations of christian liberty, very much to the satisfaction of his hearers. The sermon was published, and has been esteemed an excellent performance: But it greatly increased the jealousies which were then growing up. Some favourite points respecting church power, and the terms of christian communion, were struck at in it, and a very great cry was raised. Some papers were published against it, and the society published defences of it: But I do not mean to give the reader a history of the debates and controversies which followed upon this. They were soon brought into the general *Synod*, and continued from year to year, still increasing till they ended in an unhappy rupture in the year 1726. the *Synod*; at last, determining

determining that those ministers, who, at the time of this rupture, and for some years before, were known by the name of *Nonsubscribers*, should be no longer of their body. I do not mean, I say, to write a history of these debates (there is a very full one in the *narrative* published by the *Nonsubscribers*, to which I refer the reader) but only to give a short account of the part Mr. *Abernethy* acted in them, and of his sentiments concerning them. Yet it may not be improper, for the sake of such readers as are altogether strangers to these matters, to shew what the avowed principles of the *Nonsubscribers* were, about which the controversy was raised. These principles are contained in some propositions published in their *Narrative*, which may be abridged in a very few words, *viz.* *First*, That our Lord Jesus Christ hath in the New Testament determined and fixed the terms of communion in his church. That all christians who comply with these, have a right to communion; and that no man, or set of men, have power to add any other terms to those settled in the gospel. *Secondly*, That it is not necessary, as an evidence of soundness in the faith, that candidates for the ministry

ministry should subscribe the *Westminster* Confession, or any uninspired form of articles, or confession of faith, as the term upon which they shall be admitted. And that no church has a right to impose such subscription upon them. *Thirdly*, That to call upon men to make declarations concerning their faith, upon the penalty of cutting them off from communion, if they should refuse it; and this merely upon suspicions and jealousies, while the persons required to purge themselves by such declarations, cannot be fairly convicted upon evidence, of any error or heresy, is to exercise an exorbitant and arbitrary power, and is really an inquisition. These are the main principles of the *Nonsubscribers*. They will be found explained at large in their narrative, from *pag.* 185, to 188.

BUT the reader is not to imagine, that all the ministers of the synod denied all these propositions, and held the contradictory to them: For, with respect to the first, tho' it is the main foundation upon which the non-subscribers built, yet it is what all agree in; no one pleading, that there is any power in the church to make

new laws or terms of communion ; tho' it has been often pleaded, that church judicatories have authority to judge concerning the sense and meaning of those terms which our Saviour has fixed. But the main debates were concerning the other propositions ; and the reader will readily conjecture, that, with respect to these likewise, all who were of the subscribing side, might not be of one mind in every particular, especially as to the importance of them : But they universally went into the demand of subscription, which the others opposed.

ALL who know any thing of church-history, know, that no debates in the world have been keener or more obstinate, than those concerning matters of religion. The natural passions of the human heart are greatly enflamed by zeal, for what is believed to be the cause of truth and of God ; and intemperate heat may easily pass upon the partial and less discerning, and be indulged as a highly commendable virtue. The debates in the general synod, and in other assemblies of ministers upon the present occasion, were very warm, and abundantly fruitful of most unhappy consequences.

BEFORE

BEFORE the affair was brought into the synod, Mr. *Abernethy*, who was always looked upon as at the head of the *Non-subscribers*, had, by his uncommon abilities, and as uncommon eminency as a christian, acquired a most established reputation. He was, indeed, esteemed by many to a degree, which could hardly be due to any man: This gave him great advantage in these controversies; no man had more, or as much authority. The other members of the *Belfast*-society, as the Reader will form some notion of their abilities, from what has been said above, so were men of unblameable lives; and indeed nothing, without remarkable purity of manners, would have supported them against the torrent of prejudice, which they had, at first especially, to wrestle with; their side of the question was most unpopular, and the clamor raised against them almost universal: And the reader will, without being particularly informed, readily imagine many personal inconveniencies which those, who upon such occasions are on the unpopular side, must suffer.

M^a.

MR. ABERNETHY had the greatest share, both in conducting the counsels of the *Non-subscribers*, and managing their public debates; and he, with some others of that society, acquired extraordinary reputation for sound judgment and eloquence. He was particularly distinguished by an evenness and constancy of temper, which nothing could ruffle or discompose: He was always himself, and free from those tumults and agitations of spirit, which are often seen to deprive men of the use of very eminent abilities; let the spirit of strife and contention rage ever so much in the synod, he seemed to catch nothing of the infection: His mind always ready and clear in judging, and his utterance easy and free: He has often spoken *extempore* for a long time together, in the greatest warmth of debate, with such pertinency, temper and fluency of expression, as, while it surprized the hearers, commanded their respect and attention. A great vivacity and quickness of apprehension, a perfect presence of mind, with a penetrating judgment, happily qualified him for the part he had to act in these assemblies, which was so much the easier

easier to him, that he had a clear, strong, and agreeable voice: If his cause was disliked, the person that pleaded it with such advantage, could not but be admired; and, as he acted from a thorough persuasion of the righteousness and great importance of the cause of liberty, so he proceeded in the defence of it, with a resolution and boldness which became one who had nothing but truth and right in his aim.

THE truth is, he and his friends of the *Belfast*-society found themselves involved in great difficulties; many, who set themselves to oppose them with violence, were men much, and justly celebrated for learning and great piety; and, without doubt, acted from a principle of zeal for God: And, in assemblies constituted as the synod is, there will always be a considerable part, which cannot enter deeply into the merits of such a cause, but will be swayed by great names, and follow them in all their measures, especially when religion is apprehended to be at stake, and the foundations of it undermined, which notion greatly prevailed upon this occasion amongst the less discerning; so that it is not to be wondered

dered at, that the *Non-subscribers* were looked upon with great jealousy, and that prejudices, quite invincible by reason, were laid in against all that they could say. The populace, in most places, conceived a great dislike to them and their ministrations; and to this the authority of the synod (however sincere their aims and intentions might be, which I do not at all call in question) very much contributed. Popular reproaches fell as heavily upon Mr. *Abernethy*, as any man; and he was by many as much disliked and evil spoken of, as he had been formerly celebrated and admired; but so did he conduct himself through the whole of this controversy, that, neither in the synod, nor out of it, did he give his adversaries any advantage against him, or the least occasion of enmity. His character for discretion, candor, and greatness of mind, amongst all that knew him, and could judge, he still maintained: And, for himself, it was enough to him, that he did justice to his cause and his own conscience; the personal inconveniencies which followed upon his attachment to the cause of liberty, did not move him: And he can hardly appear to the reader in a more amiable light, than by

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imagining him in a few years, from the most admired character, and celebrated preacher in the north, become the object of jealousy and reproach, forsaken by a considerable number, even of the people of his own congregation, and all the while preserving an equal temper, without doing any thing which spoke resentment against others, or disquietude in his own mind.

AND his brethren of the *Belfast-Society*; or presbytry of *Antrim* (for having been formerly of different presbyteries, they were, by an act of the synod, some time before the rupture, joined together in one) had not only great satisfaction in him as a member, but, when things came to a crisis, and some ministers were like to suffer deeply for being of this party, his presence and conversation were a most powerful support to their minds; he did not only preserve an easy cheerful spirit himself, but had a very peculiar faculty of infusing it into others; and, as he always maintained an even temper, so he was most patient of labour and application; not at all hasty in his spirit, or discouraged from renewing his attempts by frequent disappointments; for, while things

things were not quite desperate, he continued labouring to do good, and to heal the breaches that were made, with a constant mind. Difficulties did not daunt him, nor vexatious scenes of wrathful contention and disputation make him impatient. The observation of *Solomon* was admirably exemplified in him: *A wise man is strong, and a man of knowledge increaseth strength.*

HE constantly laboured against any breach, either of ministerial or christian communion, on account of the present controversies. With this view, when jealousy and discord were grown to a very great height, and a rupture was threatned, he wrote a paper intitled; *seasonable advice to the contending parties in the north*, which was published with a preface, by the reverend Messieurs *Weld, Boyse, and Chappin*, of *Dublin*. The intention it pursues from beginning to end, is to prove, that there ought to be no breach of communion amongst the protestant dissenters in the north, on account of the late different sentiments and practices relating to subscription to the *Westminster* confession. This paper was anonymous; for Mr. *Abernethy*

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imagined it might be more useful that it was not known to come from him, who was not looked upon by all, as very zealous, and the principal advocate for liberty. The paper was sometime after answered by the reverend Mr. *Masterton*. His answer was pretty large. Mr. *Abernethy* replied in a book, to which he prefixed his name, acknowledging himself the author of the *seasonable advice*. To this reply there was a postscript by the above-named ministers of *Dublin*, answering what related to them. I shall say nothing concerning these performances, the world must judge: With this the controversy between Mr. *Abernethy* and Mr. *Masterton* ended; but the state of things grew worse and worse; people in many places were separating from the *Non-subscribing* ministers, and some of these ministers were very much reproached, as utterly unsound in their religious principles, of which Mr. *Abernethy* bore a large share; but nothing could put him so out of humour, as to divert him from studying by all means to prevent a scandalous breach of communion.

SOME

SOME of his reflections upon that melancholy state of affairs, and his own particular concernment in it, are as follow:

" O! my soul wait on the Lord, and be of
" good courage, and he shall strengthen thine
" heart. It pleases God to exercise me with
" a variety of trials; but, *tho' I am troubled*
" *almost on every side, I am not distressed,*
" *I am perplexed, but not in despair.* When
" I reflect on the times which are past,
" the troubles and temptations which have
" environed me, together with the divine
" vouchsafements in that state, I am com-
" forted; for in faithfulness God has af-
" flicted me, and has never forsaken me.
" I have been made to rejoice in tribula-
" tions, for they have work'd some in-
" crease of patience, experience and hope;
" therefore let me *account it all joy, when*
" *I fall into divers temptations:* And what
" have I now to be solicitous about? For,
" after all, that which produces inquietude
" and carelessness of mind, attended with
" confusion and pain, is an excessive re-
" gard to some present interest; for de-
" bates in my mind merely about duty, if
" nothing else be mixed with them, are

“ calm and dispassionate ; it is still something
“ selfish which produces perturbation. I
“ find myself, in my present circumstances,
“ too deeply concerned for my reputation,
“ which many are inclined fiercely to run
“ upon, because another reputation, to which
“ they are attached, seems to be affronted
“ by the resistance now made. This is a
“ worldly interest, which I am called to resign
“ and commit to God without anxiety ; all
“ that I am to study, is, that I may be
“ approved of God, leaving to his kind and
“ faithful providence all that concerns me :
“ These things I must seek after ; *first*,
“ that the free exercise and composure of
“ my mind may be preserved ; for when
“ either anger or fear, worldly sorrow or
“ carnal affection prevail, this is destroyed,
“ and even my sincerity hurt. *2dly*, That
“ the more I am tempted, the greater ad-
“ vantages I may obtain, I mean especially,
“ an increase of patience, and all the other
“ peaceable fruits of righteousness. *3dly*,
“ That my services to the church, and
“ the precious interests of religion, may
“ abound more and more. My ministry
“ is the main business of my life ; and
“ therefore, to be more diligent, faith-
“ ful,

“ful and succesful in it, is the point I
“ought to aim at, as a proper improve-
“ment of all my afflictions.”

AGAIN, “an important subject of my
“serious consideration, is, the discord a-
“mong ministers, and people of our de-
“nomination, which, if not timely reme-
“died, may have very dismal effects. The
“peace of the church is to be desired by all,
“who love our Lord Jesus Christ, and by
“all lawful means to be pursued; but a
“departure from the gospel foundations of
“peace, can never be justified. To make
“professions against the light of my own
“conscience, seems to me a most heinous
“impiety; in the mean time, there is not
“any thing I am more in danger of, than
“the secret influence of corrupt motives,
“especially an undue love of reputation,
“fear of reproach, and the disesteem of
“men, who, I am sensible, act [from
“an intemperate and ill informed zeal
“for what they think truth: This puts
“on the disguise of prudent caution
“and care to preserve my usefulness
“in the ministry; but let me always
“remember, that my usefulness, and the
e 4 “reputation

“ reputation necessary to it, is to be com-
 “ mitted to God, and resigned to him,
 “ never to be preserved by any sinful com-
 “ pliances on my part. *Lord, let integri-
 “ ty and truth preserve me, for I wait on
 “ thee.”*

UPON another occasion; “ The suffi-
 “ ciency of the scriptures to the purposes
 “ of a divine revelation, and the right of
 “ private judgment, are the stable princi-
 “ ples of protestantism, in which we ought
 “ to glory: But it is strange, what pre-
 “ judices there are in the minds of many
 “ protestants against them, as if they led
 “ to licentiousness. This seems to proceed
 “ from a wrong idea of religion, as if it
 “ consisted in a set of notions, pretended
 “ to be the determinate sense of scripture;
 “ whereas, indeed, it consists in forming
 “ our sentiments and practice on the sole
 “ authority of God, which can never be
 “ without liberty, I mean, from human
 “ decisions and sanctions. This doctrine
 “ was the subject of my public discourses
 “ this day; and it is what I must stand
 “ by, as I expect to be approved of by my
 “ great master, who will not acquit me,
 “ if

“ if I shall endeavour to transfer the faith
“ of his disciples from his own word to
“ human decrees. And shall I ever dare
“ to trifle or prevaricate in religious pro-
“ fessions? Shall I be intimidated in doing
“ my duty to God, and in maintaining the
“ rights of conscience, by an expressive re-
“ gard to the opinions of men? The pre-
“ tence of preserving my usefulness is really
“ a sham. Is that to be preserved at the
“ expence of liberty and truth? But in this
“ great affair I have my weaknesses to afflict
“ me. Lord, *strengthen me with might by*
“ *thy spirit in the inner man.*”

AGAIN, “ It has pleased God often to
“ try me with difficulties in the exercise of
“ my ministry. I have met with ill-usage
“ from many. I have been, I think, ill-
“ treated by some of my brethren; and,
“ now, contention is risen up to a destruc-
“ tive height among them. What the effects
“ of some late proceedings may be, I can-
“ not tell. But some have pushed matters
“ of debate with such vehemence, as is like
“ to render some ministers exceedingly ob-
“ noxious to the censures of an unthinking
“ multitude, and thereby to mar their use-
“ fulness.

“fulness. I pray God this may not be
 “laid to the charge of any. For myself,
 “I desire, first of all, to examine my own
 “conduct. And, I thank God, I rejoice
 “in the testimony of an unrepenting
 “heart. Nor could I have acted other-
 “wise without a gainfaying, at least a doubt-
 “ing mind. And let it never enter into
 “my heart to practise the arts of dissimu-
 “lation, and make such base compliances
 “as even *seem* to be inconsistent with the
 “prerogative of Jesus Christ, as king of
 “his church, or the sacred rights of his
 “subjects. My reputation I will commit
 “cheerfully to God, without endeavouring
 “to preserve it by any sinful methods. In
 “these and all other trying circumstances,
 “*by returning and rest I shall be saved, in*
 “*quietness and confidence shall be my strength.*”

As matters went on towards an open
 rupture amongst the ministers, so the cla-
 mors and distractions among the people
 grew more and more offensive. New con-
 gregations were erected in several places, of
 such as scrupled attending upon the minis-
 trations of *Nonsubscribers*. And ministers
 of that denomination found every where great
 difficulties

difficulties arising from the jealousies spread among their people. The reputation which Mr. *Abernethy* had acquired, and which was established by a long course of a most exemplary life, was no security to him from these. Some of his people forsook his ministry, and went to other congregations. And in some time the number of the scrupulous and dissatisfied so increased, that they were by the ministers of the *Synod* erected into a distinct congregation, and called a minister.

MR. *Abernethy*, in the whole course of this affair carried it with the greatest modesty. He had been long held in the highest esteem by many who now forsook him; and it was not a small trial of his virtue to bear every thing he met with patiently, and with the usual composure of his spirit. Many are the grave and serious reflections he makes upon this turn of affairs in his diary. But there are some tender points which forbid the publishing of them.

THERE happened about this time, a vacancy in the congregation of *Wood-street*, by the death of one of their pastors, the late

late reverend Mr. *Boyle*; and the people gave Mr. *Abernethy* an invitation to succeed him. Many circumstances concurred to incline him to accept of that invitation, and it was the opinion of most of his friends, that his removal to *Dublin* would be of real service to the dissenting interest. But he found difficulty in the prosecution of this design, arising principally from the state of his congregation at *Antrim*. The far greater part of the old congregation had adhered firmly to him, and retained as high an esteem of him as ever: And if he should leave them unsettled in that time of distraction, he imagined the consequences might be very bad. He resolved therefore to accept of the invitation from *Wood-street*, only upon condition, his people of *Antrim* should be satisfied, and actually provided with a successor. This he publicly declared as a proper expression of his regard for them. In some time they came into the choice of a minister to succeed him, upon which he declared his acceptance of the call from *Wood-street*, and immediately removed thither.

THE concern of mind with which he entered upon with this charge, and his solicitude

licitude that he might perform the service of it in a reputable and successful manner, are expressed in his diary in very strong terms; which shews how naturally great modesty and great worth dwell together. Such modest expressions, and which speak self-diffidence, uttered in conversation, often pass unheeded, as having very little meaning in them, and which are sometimes used by the most petulant and assuming. But to meet with such expressions where a man is communing only with his own heart, cannot but greatly engage the readers affection. Some little time after his settlement in *Dublin*, he married miss *Boid*, daughter of Mr. *John Boid* of *Rathmore* near *Antrim* (a gentleman of character and fortune) with whom he lived in all the tenderness of conjugal affection to his Death.

It appears from the account given of the foregoing part of his life, that Mr. *Abernetby* was a person of great industry and diligence in the proper labours of his station, and very careful in improving his time to the best purposes. When he came to *Dublin*, tho' he was there in that stage of life in which many think they may be excused

excused from laborious application to study, yet he gave himself to reading, meditation, and the composing of sermons, with as great industry as ever. He wrote all his sermons at full length, all legible, and it appears that he composed one almost every week.

IN the year 1733, the dissenters, upon the encouragement they had got from some persons of distinction on the other side the water, and strong assurances, that a considerable number of members of parliament in this kingdom would be upon their side, proposed to move the house of commons for a bill to repeal the sacramental test act. When this project was first formed, Mr. *Abernethy* wrote a paper to shew the unreasonableness and injustice of all such laws, as upon account of mere differences in religious opinions and usages incapacitate subjects, in other respects perfectly qualified for it, to serve their country in places of power or trust; and cut them off from privileges and advantages to which, as free born subjects, they have a natural and just title; and particularly, that in the present state of *Ireland*, the continuing to restrain protestants

ants by such legal incapacities, is a great error in politics, and cannot but weaken the protestant interest, and, in consequence of that, be a real loss and dis-service to the government. This paper was written with much spirit and strength of argument. But arguments are feeble things when set in opposition to the views and interests of parties. The design miscarried.

MR. *Abernethy* continued his labours in *Wood-street* for ten years, with much reputation, and found himself very happy in the society of his friends, who held him in the highest esteem. He did not indeed go much into mixed company when the business of his station did not call him to it; and often said, as conversation was generally conducted, he had little satisfaction in it. He therefore staid much at home, and applied himself to study. This was not owing to any thing sour or unsociable in his temper, for he had a taste for conversation, and was of a most cheerful, as well as affectionate spirit; but to a persuasion that much of the time spent in company was lost, at least, might be much better employ'd. And that when a habit of passing time in a trifling manner was contracted,

contracted, it must have had effects upon the mind, unbending it too much, and begetting an indolence by which men were rendered averse to application, and in some measure incapable of it. He thought that, of all men, ministers had most reason to guard against this, as it was more particularly their duty to preserve the mind always in an aptitude for the best exercises, and avoid every thing which had a tendency to dissipate the vigor of it. Observing likewise, that where the taste of the company was such, that they could not manage conversation so as to render it worthy of men of sense, and good affections, that dignity of character which they ought always carefully to maintain, must suffer by it.

To this it may be added, that, as in the present age modest merit is not very apt to be much sought after by the *great*, so no man ever less affected to put himself in the way of such than Mr. *Abernethy*, tho' few better qualified for their acquaintance, or more esteemed by those to whom he was known. He accounted it a great error, and which spoke a little mind, to court them with such humble application as some are seen to do. His constant aim was to do
good

good and adorn his own station, and it was no pain to him to be in the greatest obscurity which was consistent with this. Had he ever suffered himself to be conducted by other views, he might have very reasonably hoped to have appeared in that light, which in the sense of many, is the great thing to be contended for. But as he chose the station of a dissenting minister, of which he never repented; so he was perfectly satisfied with those circumstances which usually attend it, which indeed place men quite out of sight, where wealth and splendor are the principal objects of attention.

It may perhaps much more amaze the reader, that he so long delayed making himself known to the learned world; in which it is apparent, from what is already published, he might have appeared with the greatest reputation. It was very late in life, before he appeared in it at all; otherwise, than by a few occasional sermons, and the papers he published in the controversies in the north. This shews that name and character were not the things for which he laboured. And as modesty generally waits upon true
f greatness

greatness of mind, so an instance is rarely to be met with, in which both were more conspicuous, than in this excellent man.

BUT while his friends, from the great strength of his constitution, and the vigor of his spirit, with the perfect temperance in which he lived, promised themselves they should enjoy him many years; these pleasing prospects were unexpectedly cut off. He had for a good many years, from time to time, been attacked by the gout; suffering much pain in the extremities, but not affected in the vital parts. But, in *December* 1740, that disorder, all of a sudden, seized his head, and quickly produced the usual melancholy symptoms. As soon as he became sensible what his case was, he needed no monitor, for he immediately concluded the disorder would prove mortal, and seemed to take no notice of any thing said to the contrary by way of encouragement. After the view, which has been given of his life and spirit, it will be easy to conjecture the manner and temper with which he met death. It was with great firmness and composure of mind, a chearful acquiescence in the
the

the will, and a fixed trust in the power and goodness of that Being who governs all. He died in the sixtieth year of his age.

I HAVE already given an account of some papers he published, as the course of these short memoirs of his life made it necessary. I shall now mention the rest. The first he published, was a sermon on occasion of the accession of King *George* the first, on *Psal.* xx. 6. When he was moderator of the general synod, he preached a sermon (according to the usual rule, before them) on *Dan.* xii. 4. which was published. He printed likewise a sermon preached on a fast-day, appointed by the general synod, on account of the animosities then in the north. The text was, *1 Cor.* iii. 3. After he came to *Dublin*, he preached a set of sermons upon the divine attributes; and in his own life published an octavo volume of them, all which were upon the existence and *natural* perfections of the Deity. After his death, the second volume was published by his friends, upon the *moral* attributes. These sermons were printed in *Dublin*, and reprinted in *London*. I have only to add that

he has left behind him several volumes of miscellany sermons in manuscript, generally very practical. By the specimen presented to the reader in the two volumes now printed, which are the plainest and most practical, he will judge that they are worthy of being communicated to the world; though they cannot appear in it with that advantage they must have done, had he himself reviewed and corrected them. It is from the first draught, they are published.

I SHALL conclude this account of his life with a few particulars which have not been yet taken notice of, or only cursorily mentioned, and which contribute to give a just idea of him.

HE was very remarkable for true and sprightly wit, which was always correct and the most distant possible from levity; this rendered his conversation as agreeable and entertaining, as it was improving and useful; no person of any taste could grow weary of his company. He had naturally a negligent air, and the appearances of inattention. As there was nothing at all affected in these, they

they were not disagreeable to such as knew him; but strangers were often surprized to hear him reason justly, and speak with exactness, when he appeared to them very little to mind what he was engaged in.

OF his eminent piety much has been already said, but it deserves a particular remark, that piety appeared in him in the most amiable manner, and like itself, manly and rational; there was nothing gloomy, nothing stiff or unnatural in his religion. And he was extremely happy in a free, easy and chearful manner, in conjunction with the greatest tenderness of spirit, and the warmest zeal for God. In his temper and behaviour, men saw that religion, as it was intended to be, so is in reality, the perfection of nature; no other than the proper exercise and improvement of our faculties, and the best means of attaining to the true enjoyment of life.

THE whole of his conduct was guarded by the greatest prudence. The most important secrets might with perfect safety be committed to him. And he had the greatest

tenderneſs for the characters of mankind, He never ſpoke to a man's diſadvantage, when it was not neceſſary to answer ſome good end; and was utterly abhorrent of ſpeaking evil to gratify a malicious or envious ſpirit, or from poverty of invention and want of what to ſay in company. Indeed, his whole behaviour was ordered with great diſcretion. He was carefully attentive to all the decencies of life. The purity of his manners was unblemiſhed. He was exactly temperate, rather, indeed, to a fault, abſtemious; and ſeemed to take pleaſure in the greateſt ſeverities of virtue.

HIS paſſions were naturally ſtrong, but they were under ſuch correction, that his temper was uſually ſpoken of as quite immoveable. Incidents, which would have been ſhocking to other men, were met by him without any apparent Emotion. And in ſome circumſtances of life, which were extremely afflicting, he not only carried it with decency, but ſhewed ſuch a tranquillity of ſpirit and conſtancy, as amazed his friends. All who were acquainted with the delicacy of his temper, knew, that this was not in the leaſt owing to inſenſibility; and therefore
fore

fore must have high ideas of him, as having by religion and virtuous discipline, got above the common weaknesses of human nature. There was, indeed, no part of his character more to be admired than this.

HIS mind was formed for friendship. He entered into the true spirit of it, and had a great relish for those strict intimacies in which only the highest joys of it can be tasted. But it will be readily concluded from his character, that it must be with very few that he could enter into such intimacies. When he did, the generosity of his spirit, the tenderness of his affection, and faithful constancy, must render that relation very happy to his friend. His diary shews, that he had some such friendships, and he frequently mentions them with a spirit which became that sacred relation.

BUT he was a hearty friend, in the general acceptation of that term, to all men of worth, and ready to do good to all as he had opportunity. He was indeed sparing in professions, but never failed in important acts of kindness. And where he thought respect was due, he came short of no one in paying it. But had a just sense how unworthy

worthy it was of him to put on appearances of respect to the worthless ; and a shew of honour and regard, where disregard only and neglect were to be justly expected. From this mean vice no man was ever more free. He knew what was due to others, and what he owed to himself ; and was peculiarly happy in maintaining the dignity of of his own character, consistently with modesty and the greatest meekness of Spirit.

HE took much pleasure in directing and assisting young candidates in their studies ; and was always ready to enter into conversation with them upon any points, with the difficulty of which their minds were pressed and entangled. But made it his care principally to assist their reasonings, and in forming their judgments of things by argument, and according to evidence ; endeavouring to encourage liberty of thinking, and to take them off from all undue regard to authority, as he was himself the most distant possible from claiming any, or thinking the worse even of the youngest learner for differing from him in disputable points.

H I S

HIS faithfulness to his friends shewed itself remarkably in one thing, which is amongst the very tenderest offices, and requires the discreetest hand, that is, animadverting freely upon their culpable weaknesses. This he never failed of doing when there was the least prospect of advantage from it. And tho' he could act this part with severity enough when that was necessary, yet it was so tempered with good-will, and an apparent intention to serve the best purposes, that no one, not quite lost to ingenuous sentiments, could be displeased with him. And he thoroughly understood how to address himself to men in the most effectual manner, and could touch the affections and springs of action, with great dexterity, suiting his application to the various tempers of men, which no one could more readily find out.

HIS first appearances, as a preacher, promised very considerable things, but he quickly exceeded all the expectations of his friends. Through the whole time of his ministry in the north, he preached without the use of his notes in the pulpit ; yet was seldom

seldom or ever at a loss. A clear, composed, and assured mind, with a choice and fluency of words which never failed him, and a strong and faithful memory made the delivery of his sermons easy to him ; as a great compass of invention and readiness of thought, made the composition of them. For some years he delivered his sermons with a very great *pathos*, which tended to strike the imaginations and passions of his hearers. But he departed very much from this in his riper age, avoiding every thing which look'd like enthusiasm, and addressed himself more directly to the consciences of men, and the higher principles of action, in a style strong and nervous, rather than pathetic. After he came to *Dublin*, he constantly used his notes in the pulpit, not from any necessity he was then under, which did not oblige him to it before, but from a persuasion it was the best way, as upon other accounts, so particularly on this, that not using notes in the delivery, may prove to some a temptation to negligence in the composing of their sermons. How exact his own were, the reader will see from the sermons following.

BUT

BUT many thought he did not excel more in any thing than in prayer. In this he had a fluency of thought and expression, which seemed inexhaustible. And the discerning hearer might easily perceive great fervor of spirit, with an exact propriety of words, and very exalted strains of devotion, without any thing of the false sublime, but perfectly suitable to the gravity of a solemn address to God. It appears from his diary, that he was at much pains to qualify himself for performing this part of the public service after a right manner. His prayers upon some particular occasions were composed with great care, and committed to memory. And as he look'd upon the scriptural style to be the most becoming in our addresses to God ; so he made much use of scriptural phrases, and was very happy in the choice of those which were best adapted to the matter of his petitions, or adoration and praise.

THUS, *I have given the reader the outlines of his character, which he will perceive was very uncommon. I shall no longer detain him from the perusal of the following*
dis-

discourses, which I am persuaded will raise such an opinion of Mr. Abernethy in the discerning and judicious, as will convince them, that this essay, intended as a piece of just respect to his memory, is far from flattering it; a thing to which indeed there could be no temptation, when it is real perplexity how to give the reader a just notion of his true worth; which the author can honestly declare is the case; and is fully persuaded that such as were intimately acquainted with him, have a far higher Idea of his character, than this representation of it can possibly raise in others.

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*Herein is our love made perfect, that we
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There is no fear in love, but perfect love
casteth out fear, because fear hath torment ;
he that feareth is not made perfect in
love.*

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racter of his true Disciples.

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*He that loveth Father or Mother more than
me, is not worthy of me. And he that
loveth Son or Daughter more than me, is
not worthy of me.*

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Of the proper Improvement of
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*It is better to go to the house of mourning,
than to go to the house of feasting, for that*
is

C O N T E N T S.

is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

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But the path of the just, is as the shining light, that shineth more and more, unto the perfect day.

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S E R-

S E R M O N I.

Of SELF-DENIAL.

Matth. xvi. 24.

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself.

TH E S E words certainly contain what SERM.
is of the greatest importance to all I.

Christians, for it is an essential part of the christian character. Whatever is particularly meant by a man's denying himself, our Saviour expressly declares it, has a strict connexion with being his true disciple; the universality of the demand, and the indispensable necessity of complying with it, could not be more strongly express'd in words, *If any man*, any one of mankind however distinguished, Jew or Gentile, of whatever sort or condition he be, will become a follower of mine, he must deny himself; on no other terms will I acknowledge him for my sincere and approved disciple. Let us therefore apply our minds to the serious consideration of that

SER M. *self-denial* which the religion of Christ en-

I. joyns ; and to assist you in it, I will endeavour
 in this discourse, *first*, to explain, and *secondly*,
 to vindicate it from any just imputation of fe-
 verity, and shew the reasonableness of it.

First, the word *denying*, in its primary sig-
 nification, means either an act of the under-
 standing, refusing its assent to a proposition
 laid before it ; or an act of the will refusing its
 consent to an application, request, or desire
 which is presented to it. From this last is bor-
 rowed the figurative expression of denying ones
 self. As there are various tendencies in our
 nature, various appetites, affections, and pas-
 sions, prompting us to different actions, when
 the mind deliberating upon them, comes to a
 determination of choosing some, and rejecting
 others directly opposite, those, which are so
 rejected, are said to be denied. And because
 the motions, however contrary, are all from
 within ; for though the occasion, or the object,
 may be foreign, yet the propensity or the af-
 fection, we know is our own ; therefore the
 thwarting and controuling such motions, is
 call'd a denial of ourselves. For example,
 when the lower appetites and inclinations,
 which the apostle *James* calls *lust*, compre-
 hending them all under one denomination,
 when

when this, I say, comes in competition with SERM.
conscience, and the virtuous affections; the I
one, or the other, must be denied; and they
are both comprehended in our selves: but it is
the former our religion requires us to deny.
To speak in the stile of the sacred writer just
now referred to, when the conceptions of lust
are entertained and carry the determination of
the mind, then sin is brought forth, when
conscience prevails, and the practical decision
is on its side, then an act of christian self-
denial is perfected.

This notion of a diversity of practical principles, or springs of action in the human heart, is familiar in the scriptures and other moral writings; nor without it can we understand the practice of virtue in our present state, which is a state of trial and discipline. We meet in the ancient moralists, frequently, with a distinction between the rational and irrational, the merely sensitive and the intelligent, the inferior and the superior part of men. There are some parts of our constitution common to us with the brutal kinds; for the animal nature to answer the ends of it's being, and it's preservation, is mov'd by instincts to pursue its proper objects; but we are capable of reflection, which the brutes are not; of considering the ends of those instincts, and thereby judging of

B 2

the

SERM. the measures and limits within which their di-

I. rection shall be follow'd ; and we are indued with higher faculties and affections, to which the other are subordinated ; and with liberty to pursue the nobler ends of our rational and moral powers. Hence arises the struggle between the motions and tendencies of these different principles, which every man may find in his own experience, as the apostle expresses it, *the spirit lusteth against the flesh, and the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and these two are contrary, the one to the other ;* a virtuous disposition consists in the prevalence of the spirit or conscience, and a vicious temper in the predominancy of the lower appetites.

But, I know no author who carries this distinction farther, and states it more clearly, than the apostle *Paul* in the 7th chapter of his epistle to the *Romans*. He gives a very lively description, as in his own person, of two opposite interests or principles in one man : one called *sin that dwells in him, the body of sin and death*, comprehending the whole complex of inward temptations, which take their rise from the body, so intimately near, that a man finds them often working in his heart, to entice and draw him away : the other call'd I more properly the *man*, the rational self-judging agent, that has the absolute supremacy by the order of nature, the right of restraining the lower
self,

self, which the laws of our religion oblige us to deny. Again, St. *Paul* distinguishes these two contrary springs of action, by the names of the *law of the mind*, and the *law in the members*, warring against it : they both, in some sense, operate like laws with sanctions upon our hopes and fears of pleasure and pain ; but the former only, that of the mind, is the true law of our nature as well as of Christianity : and the other, to be brought into subjection, or its government to be denied. SERM.
1.

It is not necessary to enumerate the particulars contain'd in this general head, *the self*, to be denied. Every man knows, for he is conscious of them, the appetites of his nature to sensible objects, and which pursue the pleasures of the external senses, they are in some weaker, in some stronger, even by their different constitutions ; but all have them in some degree. We find likewise aversions to bodily pain and other outward uneasinesses of various sorts, too many to be mention'd ; and we find impulses of anger, a strong inclination, attended with vehement motions in the body, to repel violence offered or harm received from a voluntary invader ; which is properly an animal instinct, for it is seen in beasts as well as in men, intended originally by the author of nature,

SERM. for the safety of the animal ; but often carried
 I. beyond the bounds which that end prescribes.

But, besides the instincts originally planted in us for the preservation of the animal life, and which terminate there, there are other desires and propensities contracted from our knowledge of the world, and the common course of things in it, which are also a part of the *self* to be denied. When we have begun to tread the path of life, and are capable of observing the conditions of men, we obviously discern a disparity in them ; some have much greater measures of power, honour, and wealth than others ; and the advantage of superiority in these respects is as easily seen, for it furnishes more abundantly the means of various enjoyment. Hence arises, though without any previous excitations in nature, strong desires, and an eager pursuit of riches and grandeur ; which having no connection with the highest ends of our being, are to be retrench'd by the law of the mind ; for, when they are indulg'd, they grow up to the pernicious vices of covetousness and ambition ; or what the apostle *John* calls *the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life* ; eminent branches of the love of the world, which he pronounces utterly inconsistent with the love of the Father, or true religion.

A multitude there are of other principles of S E R M. action, or which have the force of principles, I. affections, passions and determinations of one kind or other in the human mind, which may be considered in the same view, that is, as objects of self-denial, because their tendencies often interfere with a right moral conduct, or with the duty of Christians. Fear sometimes brings a snare; sorrow is frequently immoderate, both often misleading men from the path of virtue, and drawing them into the most dangerous errors in practice. But I will not insist on these things particularly.

It is time we should consider what is meant by denying them, or whatever may be called *self*: and certainly it is not that we should extirpate any natural affection, appetite or passion. Our constitution is what God has been pleas'd to make it. In vain should we attempt to make any essential alteration, and 'tis impious to think, that he requires it; for it would be to reproach his work as if it were faulty, and endeavour to destroy it. But indeed our whole nature is wisely fram'd, and no part of it unnecessary, so far from being evil. Every passion, every appetite, every instinct in the mind has its particular use, as well as each member of the body; as any one may be convinc'd who attentively considers that matter.

SERM. Nor have we power over the first motions of
 I. our Instincts, any more than over their being.

It is their nature to operate in suggesting to the mind, what is agreeable to them, and so far we are no more voluntary accountable agents, than in animal actions and motions, which have no dependance at all upon our own choice. Can it enter into any ones mind, that the uneasy sensations of hunger and thirst, with the simple desire of meat and drink common to all animals, and preventing any thought or deliberation, that these are sins? The perfectly innocent *Jesus*, altogether free from every kind and degree of moral evil, had them as other men have; tho' sometimes 'tis certain the desire, but not without a voluntary indulgence, grows to a criminal excess; which is the vice of intemperance. The same must be said concerning other natural appetites and passions, the first motions whereof are not faulty, tho' they may be the occasions of, or temptations to sin, when they are not duely regulated and restrained, which is the province of reason and conscience. But

Secondly, It is exceeding plain, that self-denial imports our absolute refusal to comply with any motion or suggestion in our minds, from whatever quarter it springs, so far as to

do what we know to be sinful. There are SERM.
 some cases, wherein perhaps 'tis difficult to fix I.
 the precise limits of right and wrong; but
 there are others, wherein it is not difficult at
 all, and these by far the most numerous. Some
 actions are so expressly prohibited by the law
 of God, and have such a glaring turpitude and
 malignity, as strikes the mind at the first view
 of them; as adultery, murder, theft, the lust
 of a man's heart may entice him to all these.
 His lasciviousness may prompt him to the most
 odious acts of impurity; his covetousness may
 solicit him to steal; his wrath may push him
 on to the most destructive outrages against
 his neighbour. But self-denial must pass for
 nothing at all, if it does not restrain such ex-
 orbitances; and a man is abandon'd to himself
 in the worst sense, conscience having utterly
 lost its sovereignty, unless it interposes to for-
 bid, nay, and effectually to prevent those
 finished heinous transgressions. Let me add,
 here, that sin is not only completed in exter-
 nal acts: when the heart deliberately consents
 to the temptations, and a resolution passes of
 complying with it, the guilt of that wicked-
 ness is really contracted, tho' the outward act
 should never follow. Thus our Saviour in his
 sermon upon the mount, *Matt. v.* expounds
 the commandments of the moral law, in op-
 position

SERM. position to the short and defective comments

I. of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, at the 22 *ver.*
 he pronounces anger resting in the bosom, and breaking out into provoking and insulting words, tho' there be no blood-shed, I say, he pronounces this to be a violation of the sixth commandment, whereby the penalty of disobedience is incurr'd, and at the 28 *ver.* he states a plain case, wherein he expressly declares that adultery is already committed in the heart, without proceeding any further. In other parallel instances, the same judgment is to be made, and therefore we must conclude, that the precept of self-denial reaches to the preventing sinful purposes of heart, as well as the perpetration of outward evil actions. And in this case to deny ourselves, is no more than what *St. Paul* tells us the gospel, or the grace which brings salvation, was intended to teach men; that is, to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts; as well as the acts of impiety and vice, to which they solicit us.

Thirdly, There are no appetites, desires, and passions, planted in the human nature, but what tend to an innocent, if it be a moderate gratification. The fault lies only in the excess; or in transgressing those limits which the obvious reason of things, or the laws of God have

Of Self-Denial.

11

have set to the affections, the pursuit and enjoyment. The desire of eating and drinking may be lawfully gratified, so far as the necessity of life requires, but in being *drunk with wine there is excess*, as the apostle speaks; indulging appetite in such a measure as to oppress nature, and render us unfit for rational, manly, pious, virtuous and charitable exercises: this is sinful, and ought to be denied. Natural affection to parents, to brothers and sisters, and to children is innocent, nay virtuous: and to be without it is one of the worst of characters: but it becomes criminal when it prevails to such a degree, that thro' the influence of our dearest relatives, or a solicitude for their interest, we desert our duty to God. Here the province of self-denial is very plain. It is to restrain our appetites, desires, and passions within due bounds, so as to preserve the supremacy of conscience; their just share to the higher affections in forming our tempers, and their proper influence in the direction of our conduct. And if the instincts of nature are to be so far under government, our obligation must be as great with respect to propensities we have contracted, which are sometimes strong even as nature itself, taking their rise from prejudice, custom, and false notions, which we have imbibed thro' inattention. And,

SERM.
I.

Lastly,

SERM.

I.

Lastly, It should be our constant care, that our thoughts do not unduely dwell on the objects of the lower appetites and passions; for the tendency of this is to strengthen our affections to them, and increase their influence on our practice. We cannot hinder the first impressions of these objects, nor the first motions of our affections and desires to them: but the entertaining them in our thoughts, and meditating upon them is more voluntary. The imagination is often employed actively in colouring them, and setting them off with advantage; in forming scenes of pleasure which heighten desire, and various projects in order to fulfil it. This might be in a great measure restrained, by a careful attention and purpose of heart to exercise our thinking powers in a better and more proper manner: but when our vain thoughts lodge within us, and the fancy, not corrected by reason, heightens the apparent agreeableness of tempting objects, the mind is thereby betrayed into a compliance with the motions of lusts beyond the bounds which God's law has set us: and this by frequent indulgence grows into habit, which becomes a strong principle of action, forming the temper, and depriving the superior powers of their just dominion.

As

As this is the natural progress of sin, where-
by it advances to its reign in our mortal bodies, bringing the soul into the most abject slavery; in opposition to it, self-denial become habitual would recover us to true freedom, restoring the sovereignty of reason and conscience. And the acquiring of such a habit I would principally recommend as the very perfection of our obedience to our Saviour's command in the text. It is acquired as all other habits are, by customary practice or frequently repeated acts. Let us then arm ourselves with strong resolution, and in pursuance of it, accustom ourselves to watch over the first tendencies of appetite and passion; to examine carefully the report of the imagination concerning them; to suspend our consent to their motions, till we have maturely weighed and compared them with the just rules of action, and seen them agreeable; peremptorily to reject their demands when conscience gainsays, or is doubtful; and resolutely to oppose their dominion. When this kind of discipline is habitual to us, the difficulties of self-denial are conquered, and the practice of our duty is easy.

Indeed, when men have long gone on in an evil course, and have been used to indulge every appetite without controul, their first essays

SERM. essays in the way of self-denying virtue will
 I. be painful to them. The * Prophet *Jeremiah*
 compares the impotence of mind to act worthily, which is contracted by vicious habits, to natural impossibilities. *As the Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots, so they who have been accustomed to do evil, cannot learn to do well:* which, at least, imports a very great difficulty. But even this difficulty is not altogether unconquerable. Strong virtuous resolutions, by the assistance of divine grace, have got the better of very bad habits. The conquest however cannot be obtained without a struggle; and they who will break off their sins by repentance, and return to the paths of righteousness, must lay their account to meet with pain and uneasiness, especially at the beginning. To this imperfect state of mens minds are accommodated the Scripture representations of this duty, which describe it under the notions of *mortifying the deeds of the body and crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts* †. Our Saviour uses the figurative expressions of ‡ *plucking out the right eye and cutting off the right hand*, which mean the same thing with denying ourselves, only signifying, that violence must be done to vicious and worldly inclinations

* Jer. xiii. 23. † Gal. v. 24. ‡ Matt. v. 29.

tions confirm'd by habit, and the reluctance arising from their prevalence in the heart must be overcome, be it ever so painful. This is the disadvantage which attends our infancy in a virtuous state; and therefore the scripture account of self-denial under the idea of mortification was well adapted to the new disciples of Christ in the first age, as it is to others in every age, whose condition is parallel in respect of weakness.

But Christians should always be growing up to perfection in every virtue: and in order to that increasing in self-denial, which it may be expected will go on the more successfully, because it still becomes more easy. And indeed it may be very useful for Christians of the highest attainments who are zealously pressing on to perfection, by a customary severity towards their inferior appetites, to lay restraints upon their liberty, within the limits of what is strictly lawful, that they may the more effectually restore and preserve a dominion over themselves, that thereby they may be the more stedfast, abounding in the work of the Lord. This kind of discipline St. *Paul* used, as he tells 1 Cor. ix. 27. *I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection*; that is, as appears from the preceding verses, by denying myself liberty in the use of indifferent things, in order to my being

SERM. being less incumber'd, and proceeding with
 I. greater expedition in the christian race; and
 that I may the better secure to myself the
 prize of the high calling of God in Christ
 Jesus.

Secondly, I come now to vindicate this precept of self-denial, from any just imputation of severity; and shew the reasonableness of it. This precept of christianity has been objected against by men who attend more to the sound than the meaning of words, and are ready to lay hold on the first slender appearances of an argument against religion, without examining them thoroughly. They alledge, 'tis unnatural to require that men should deny themselves; that is, subdue, renounce, and mortify the desires and passions which God has planted in their hearts, to no purpose, unless to make them uneasy, if they are not to be gratified. Such reasoning will have very little weight with serious attentive minds: for the weakness of it presently appears when we look into the constitution of our nature itself. Who does not feel interfering tendencies in his own heart; desires at once to different objects, desires, which cannot be gratified at once, but one necessarily must yield to another? What then shall we take upon us to censure the work of God our maker, as an inconsistent self-contradictory system

system? shall we say to him that formed us, why hast thou made me thus, with inclinations not to be satisfied; particularly, with desires of sensual and worldly enjoyment; with desires of revenge, or rather of self-defence, perverted by our own fault into revenge; and at the same time with affections of a quite different tendency, and with conscience, which remonstrates against the gratifying of our lower desires in many instances, and torments us if we do not restrain them? what then? where is the inconsistency in all this? I hope the variety which appears in our constitution, is no argument against the wisdom and goodness of the author, since there is provision made for order and harmony, and for a high, a rational happiness to be obtain'd by us, if we will preserve that subordination in the exercise of our powers and affections, which the frame of nature itself clearly points to. But I need not carry the argument so far, my present subject does not require a defence of the foundations of natural religion and morality, it is enough to rest the defence of christianity, that part of it I am now considering upon them. Let us then take the constitution of human nature, as in fact we find it to be; and, I think, every considerate person will be convinced, that according to it, we cannot be happy, but in the practice of virtue,

SERMON. and that we cannot practise virtue without self-denial. I. Now shall we find fault with the author of our religion for requiring us to do what our own reason requires, and without which we cannot have peace in our own minds, nor any hopes of a future felicity?

Again, if we consider the life of man, as it now is within the limits of the present state, abstracting from the consideration of religious virtue, and of a future condition of being, we shall find that self-denial is necessary to our obtaining the ends of it; and that this is a precept of prudence as well as christianity. Man in his present state, which to every one who considers it attentively will appear to be a state of probation and discipline, may be considered in two different capacities, the natural and the religious; between which there is a remarkable analogy: both are under the government of divine providence; both terminate in such happiness as we are capable of, but of different kinds; the one aims at, and has its complete end in our highest felicity, which consists in the perfection of virtue and righteousness; the other, the natural capacity, pursues the greatest ease, prosperity, or enjoyment, which in the whole can be attained here: the attaining of these different ends in a great measure, depends upon ourselves. As virtue is improveable

proveable, and by degrees grows up to per-
fection by our own diligence ; so every one sees
in the fruition of life, our interest is carried
on, and our temporal happiness advanced by
the proper exercise of our own powers, and
the prudent diligent use of such means as pro-
vidence puts into our hands. Both are ob-
structed by the same means, and both promo-
ted by the same means. The great impedi-
ments to our interests in this world, I mean the
regular and successful prosecution of them,
are appetites and passions, especially when con-
firmed by habits. Who is the man that enjoys
life, easily attains to a comfortable worldly
estate, and to a high reputation ? not surely
the glutton, the drunkard, the sluggard, the
proud, the revengeful and the cruel ; or that
any other way gives an unbounded liberty to his
lusts and his passions ; but, on the contrary,
he that is master of himself, that can thwart
his humours, bridle his inclinations and deny
his ease, or other sensual gratifications ; and
the same are the means of advancing to moral
perfection. We see then that God, as the
master of our lives and worldly estates, the
guardian of our present condition of being,
has taught us to deny ourselves ; and that by
the same kind of discipline which is necessary
to our being wise in our present generation, we

SERM.
I.

SERM. are inured to, and prepared for the best and

I. and most important wisdom, even that which
 is unto salvation.

Let us consider how great, how noble the ends of virtue, of moral perfection and the future happiness, are above those of the present life ; and if wisdom requires our denying our appetites and passions for the latter, shall we complain of it as a hardship to submit to the same self-denial for the other ? Is he justly counted a fool with respect to his concerns in this world, who will not curb his appetite of thirst to prevent or cure a dropsy ; who will sacrifice a reasonable prospect of lawful gain to sloth and laziness ; or who to gratify a little peevish resentment will throw himself out of the way of rising to an honourable station in his country ? and what shall we think of the man, who will wilfully indulge himself in these or such like passions, at the expence of his integrity, the inward peace of his mind, and his hopes of heaven ?

Thus you see, that this precept, so far from being an unreasonable imposition on the liberties of mankind, is excellently accommodated to the constitution and the state of human nature, nay, and absolutely necessary to the attaining its true ends. But our Saviour has made it a part of his religion, and he has enforced

forc'd it with peculiar motives. It will always SERM.
 have great weight with every sincere disciple of I.
 Christ, that this is, by his own express declaration, an essential part of that character, and
 an indispensable condition, without which we
 cannot expect his approbation: *If any man will
 come after me let him deny himself.* Whatever
 you do in compliance with the christian institution, must pass for nothing, if this one duty
 be neglected. Tho' you believe the gospel,
 and profess it zealously, contend for the faith,
 and be ever so assiduous in attending all the positive appointments of religion; what will all
 avail unless you learn to deny yourselves?

Farther we may observe, that as divine wisdom shines in all our Saviour's instructions, so particularly his enforcement of this duty is adapted in the best manner to our state of infirmity and temptation. When men are vehemently urg'd to indulge their appetites and passions, as in the case of bad habits, or of some peculiarly strong worldly attachments, as when the interest of a tenderly beloved friend comes in competition with our duty; so that the soliciting affection is dear as a right hand or an eye, in that case the mind under a violent hurry and perturbation, cannot calmly attend to more ingenuous considerations, and therefore a stronger remedy is applied; the terrors of the

SERM. Lord are set against the allurements of the

I. flesh, and we are dissuaded from gratifying ourselves by the fear of future punishment. Thus our Saviour, supposing an inward cause of offence to tempt us very violently, and that so strong is our affection, we are as unwilling to renounce it as to suffer the amputation of a bodily member, even that it self would be submitted to for saving life, and here a greater necessity is laid upon us ; for we have no other choice than either to bear the uneasiness of denying the present gratifications, or suffer the dreadful penalty of God's eternal displeasure, * *It is better for thee to enter into life maimed, or halt, or having one eye, than having two hands, and two feet and two eyes, to be cast into hell fire, where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.* And,

Lastly, The example of our great Master himself is propos'd to us. It is said of him, *Rom. xv. 3. that he pleas'd not himself.* He had no irregular appetites to gratify ; but the same sensibility to the ease and innocent pleasures of life as other men : but he denied them, submitting to hunger and thirst, and weariness in attending the work his Father sent him to the world for, that is glorifying him and

* Mark ix. 43—48.

and doing good. He was denied to the honour **SERM.**
and esteem among men, which he had the **I.**
best title to, enduring the contradiction of sin-
ners and bearing grievous reproach ; and even
to life itself which he sacrificed to the cause
of truth and holiness, and for the redemption
of mankind. If then we *abide in him*, let us
walk as he did, and follow his Example.

S E R M O N II.

The Gospel a Law of *Liberty*.

James ii. 12.

*So speak ye and so do, as they that shall be judged
by the law of liberty.*S E R M.
II.

ALL men who have a just sense of the dignity and privileges of the human nature, consider liberty as an inestimable endowment which God has vouchsafed unto us, to be by all means preserv'd inviolable, to be zealously asserted and earnestly contended for. The greatest part of the creatures which we see have no share in it; the whole system of inanimate things is necessarily subject to the direction of almighty power, and is moved by the sovereign will of the Creator. The lower Species of animals have a kind of Freedom, but in a very narrow sphere, being active and determining themselves only according to their Instincts for the purposes of a very limited and short-liv'd existence. But, the author of nature having distinguished man with much higher

higher capacities and made him for nobler SERM.
ends, has given him suitable liberty, a pow- II.
er of pursuing those ends by the light of his
larger understanding, of comparing a great va-
riety of motives to action, and making a choice
upon the comparison. Every one feels him-
self possess'd of this privilege and rejoices in
it; without it we cannot well conceive how
we should have any taste for happiness; this,
at least, is certain, that the highest, and the
greatest variety of our enjoyments spring from
our acting voluntarily. But it is in its own
nature capable of being abused; a liberty of
doing right, is, in us at least, accompanied
with a liberty of doing wrong; and if we may
freely pursue our own happiness, we may also
freely make ourselves unhappy, which indeed
is the case of very many; not that they have
any such express intention, for it's impossible
any intelligent being should not desire its own
good, but thro' mistake, and inadvertency,
and corrupt prejudices, they are led into wrong
measures. Nay, very often so it is, that thro'
a supine indolence, neglecting to use and to
improve those powers which ought to direct
the exercise of their liberty, and giving up
themselves habitually to be conducted by the
lower spring of action in human nature, by
appetites and passions, men lose in a great
measure,

SERM. measure, the privilege itself, and are in a kind

II. of servitude; so the scripture represents it and very justly. A liberty to act against reason, and against the principal end of our being, is not worthy of the name, but is a real bondage.

This having been the wretched condition of mankind generally, so far that they were *dead in trespasses and sins*, overcome of their corruptions, and by them *brought into bondage*, it was the glorious design of christianity to recover them to true freedom; so our Saviour himself expressly declares in the 8th of St. John's gospel, 31st and 32d verses: *Then said Jesus to the Jews which believed on him, if ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.* This is the high privilege which by my religion ye shall obtain; if ye firmly believe the truths I have taught you, if you adhere to them constantly, and improve them faithfully, you shall be free. And when they misunderstood his words, apprehending that he referred to an outward servitude to men which they never had been under, he explains himself at the 34th ver. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin*; to be freed from that slavery is the truest freedom, which he intended to restore to men; and he adds 36th ver. *If the*
Son

Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free SERM. II.
indeed. Thus we are to understand the prophetic declaration of *Isaiah*, chap. lxi. which our Lord applies to himself, *Luke*, iv. 18. *The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.* Agreeably to which the apostle in my text gives the gospel the excellent character of the law of liberty, as he also doth in the 1st chap. of this epistle, and 25th ver. with the addition of this epithet, *the perfect law of liberty*; and as this is a very amiable representation and most worthy of our serious attention, I will endeavour in the following discourse, *first*, to explain it: *2dly*, I will consider the apostles direction to christians, that they should constantly endeavour to form their whole conduct, by a respect to the future judgment, which will be dispensed according to the gospel, the law of liberty. *So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.*

First, To explain this character of the christian religion, that it is a *law of liberty*. It is evident that it is a law, that is, a revelation of the will of god to men for the direction

SERM. direction of their lives, enforced by the sanc-

II. tion of rewards and punishments. Yet our
 condition is not rendered servile by it; for we
 ought not to imagine that every kind of re-
 straint, and whatever is intended to give a di-
 rection to the exercise of these powers, which
 are the subject of liberty, that I say, every
 thing of this kind is inconsistent with freedom.
 We can't in any case act without motives,
 but they do not make us slaves. The brutes
 are determined by the appearance of sensible
 good, in which proportionably to the degrees
 and kind of their perception, they have liber-
 ty. The human nature being rational, rea-
 son does not destroy its freedom, but establish
 it, and is the rule of it; then only are we
 indeed free when we conduct ourselves with
 understanding. Nay, the liberty of the Su-
 preme Being, the most perfect of all, is al-
 ways exercised with the exactest wisdom and
 rectitude. Perhaps some imagine that it is a high
 privilege to act without regard to any motive,
 and that the will should determine itself with
 a kind of supremacy independant of reason;
 but it cannot be, the very frame of our nature
 does not allow it, that our minds should not
 be influenced by motives; and whether is he
 more free who is governed by those of sense
 merely, or of reason? It is true they are in this
 respect alike free, that they equally act with-
 out

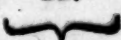
out constraint ; but surely it cannot be difficult SERM.
to determine whether the liberty of a man or II.
a beast be the most valuable, and whether the
real excellence of that privilege does not al-
ways depend on, and is proportioned to the
wisdom with which it is exercised. A man
in a fever, or a disturbance of mind from any
other outward cause, acts with all the appear-
ance of freedom, and yet no one will say that
he is really free ; which must rest on this
principle as its foundation, that the exercise of
true human liberty depends on the exercise of
reason, and still the less reason, the less li-
berty.

Again, as the creator of all things is infi-
nitely good, he must have bestowed this high
prerogative on man, not to make him misera-
ble, but to make him happy. But, if we
consider the intire human constitution, it will
appear that the use of liberty without reason
or against it, tends to misery. We cannot be
happy otherwise than in the harmony of our
powers and affections ; and if there must be
harmony there must be government, a subor-
dination of some to others, because our affec-
tions have very different, nay, very opposite
tendencies. The man who gives himself
wholly up to the direction of his senses and
appetites, will find that the superior faculties
make

SERM. make contrary demands; and if those demands

II. be not complied with, they give him very great uneasiness, the greatest often that the mind is capable of, so that he cannot enjoy his lower pleasures without controul. It is true, that by a customary indulgence to vicious inclinations, that uneasiness abates; but the peace and the liberty then enjoyed is unnatural, and rather a real stupidity. Besides, that it is of no certain continuance; when outward gratifications fail, when afflictive events press the mind, or any other inevitable occasions of self-reflection, it comes then with a greater force and more exasperated severity, because conscience has been so long laid asleep, and the tormenting presages of future misery as the penal consequences of sin, are a most painful ingredient in it. On the other hand, when reason and Conscience have their full force in the mind, when the inferior springs of action are subject to them, and controuled by their law, there is an inward security and peace, solid and lasting, and all the uneasiness which arises from the rebellion of the appetites and passions, is over-ballanc'd by the very pleasure of thwarting and denying them. Upon the whole, then, it appears, that the only true liberty suitable to the human nature, worthy to be desired by us, and which tends to our

real

real perfection and happiness, is that which is **SERM.**
exercised according to the direction of reason **II.**
and wisdom. 

On this account principally the gospel is called the law of liberty, it restores the empire of reason in men, and rescues them from servitude to their lusts and passions. It has this denomination on another account, which I may afterwards insist on, namely, as it has abolished the ceremonial-law, a yoke, which St. Peter says, *neither we nor our fathers were able to bear* *. This liberty by the gospel is largely explained by the apostle Paul. But St. James, not treating of that subject particularly, it is reasonable to understand the character as applied by him in a greater latitude. In the 1st chap. he has recommended a diligent attention to, and a due improvement of the word of God, that we should receive it *with meekness as the ingrafted word which is able to save us, laying apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness*; and, then, he describes the different sorts of hearers, the careless, unattentive, unreformed; and the serious and obedient. The former he compares to a man *beholding his natural face in a glass, who soon forgets what manner of man he was*. The other, looking stedfastly, and with the most earnest attention into the gospel, is transform'd
by

* Acts xv. 10.

SERM. by the renewing of his mind, and becomes a
 II. faithful and constant doer of the will of God.

'Tis in this description he inserts the Character of *the law of liberty*, which, therefore, I conclude has a reference to the rescuing of men from the power of their vices and corrupt affections, that they may practise pure religion as the proper effect of christianity.

The connexion of the text stands thus. The apostle had censur'd the *Jews*, to whom he writes, for their partiality in making distinctions among men according to their outward condition, exhorting them to fulfil the royal law, *thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*, which abstracts from all such considerations. To this law we must have an universal respect, not obeying it in one instance only, but in all, otherwise we shall not be accepted; then follows, *so speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty*, which application plainly points to universal obedience as the proper intent of the gospel, in opposition to the contrary tendency of our own lusts and passions.

Indeed St. Paul himself explains the freedom we have obtained by the law of *Christ* in this manner; as in the viiith to the Rom. 2d ver. *For the law of the spirit of the life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin*

fin and death. What these opposite laws are, SERM.
II. appears from the preceding chapter, where

they are called the *law of the members*, and *the law of the mind*; the one leading to sin, and holding the soul in captivity to it, which is a most wretched and cruel slavery; the other directing to that which is good and well-pleasing in God's sight. Now, since immediately to this is subjoined that account of the christian law, or the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, that it makes us free from the law of sin and death, what can the meaning be, but that it restores the sovereignty of the mind, delivering it from the reign of sin in the mortal body, that henceforth christians should yield themselves unto God, and their members the instruments of righteousness, which is the truest liberty, the liberty of men, of intelligent and moral agents?

Secondly, Pursuant to this, christians by the gospel have obtained a deliverance from condemnation, and therefore it may justly be called the law of liberty. Death is the punishment of sin, established unalterably by the law of God; mankind, therefore, conscious of guilt, have a dread of it which fills their minds with horror, and holds them in an uncomfortable bondage. According to the clearness of the apprehensions which

SERM. they have concerning the divine law, and

II. the threatnings contained in it, so is their terror; and the Jewish law being the most express in this point, without declaring the remission of sin, it is, therefore, called the *ministration of death* and of *condemnation*; and they who were under it, *received the spirit of bondage to fear*, as the apostle says, *Rom. viii. 15.* But, Christ Jesus having *tasted death for every man*, and being, in order to reconcile us to God, as mediator, made *partaker of flesh and blood*, that by death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil, he has by his law of grace proclaimed forgiveness, and an immunity from the punishment of sin to such as sincerely repent, thus express'd, *Heb. ii. 15.* *to deliver them who through fear of death were all their life time subject to bondage.* Upon which they who are so delivered receive the spirit of adoption, whereby they serve God and obey his commandments with freedom and chearfulness.

Thirdly, The gospel is a law of liberty, as it frees christians from the burthensome rites of the Mosaic institution. When God was pleased to separate the Israelites for a peculiar people unto himself, and form them

into

into a nation and a church, he saw fit, for SERM.
what reasons I do not now inquire, to appoint II.

a multitude of ceremonies which were to continue in force during that dispensation. This must be very grievous to a rational worshipper, whose great satisfaction it is to see the reasonableness of the actions he performs, and their conduciveness to the true ends of worship. The apostles therefore speak meanly of those ordinances, comparing them with the liberty, the spirit and truth of christianity; they call them carnal, beggarly elements, the rudiments of this world, and only shadows of good things to come. Besides, the terror which accompanied that ministration because of the severity of its threatnings, the weakness and unprofitableness of the service itself made the very attendance on it a great grievance. But, now, the Lord is *that spirit* of which christianity is the ministration; not like the *killing* letter of the Old Testament, which denounced wrath for every offence, but a ministry of righteousness or justification, which exceeds in glory, especially, because thereby the excellent things of religious virtue, the divine precepts of eternal righteousness, are *engraven on the fleshy tables of the heart*, forming in it noble dispositions, most be-

SERM. coming the dignity of the human nature.

II.

And where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty, an enlargement of heart, and confidence becoming the sons of God. The different conditions of the servants of God by the law and the gospel, is represented, *Gal. iv.* by the difference between the state of a child who is an heir under age, and that of one who has obtained the plenary possession and free enjoyment of his inheritance. *Now, I say, that the heir as long as he is a child differeth nothing from a servant or bondman, tho' he be Lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father; even so, we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons; and because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of his son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.*

And, *lastly*, the gospel is a law of liberty, as it sets us free from the power and authority of men in matters of religion and conscience. The Jews were in a servile state,
not

not only by a multiplicity of external rites SERM.
which were of undoubted obligation, be- II.
cause God had appointed them; but their }
teachers superadded to this yoke many cere-
monies merely of their own invention, and
imposed them on the people. This they
carried so far that our Saviour himself in-
veighed against them with great severity,
declaring that they transgressed the com-
mandment of God, and made it of no
effect by their traditions; and to this pur-
pose he applies the words of the prophet
*Isaiah, Matt. xv. 8. This people draweth
nigh unto me with their mouth, and honou-
reth me with their lips, but their heart is far
from me; but in vain do they worship me,
teaching for doctrines the commandments of
men.* The blessed author of christianity has
taken care to guard against such an invasion
of his prerogative and the rights of his dis-
ciples, by establishing it as a perpetual law,
that no one who is called by his name, and
is his professed follower, shall at any time
claim a legislative authority in his church,
*Matt. xxiii. 8. Be not ye called Rabbi, for
one is your master even Christ, and all ye are
brethren; and call no man your father upon
the earth, for one is your father which is in
heaven. Neither be ye called master, for one*

SERM. *is your master, even Christ.* Do not aspire

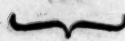
II. to such a domination over one another as the Jewish masters and heads of schools do, who arrogate a precedency and jurisdiction even in religious things; but it shall not be so with you my disciples; the firm bond of your union, and foundation of your mutual good offices to each other, is your strict adherence to God your father, and your head and Saviour Christ Jesus. It would indeed be an intolerable bondage to have conscience in subjection to frail and fallible men, but it is the high privilege of Christ's servants, that they acknowledge no other lord but himself, and have an unalienable right to search the records of his will, every one for himself, as being only accountable to him. I come in the

Second place, to consider the apostle's direction to christians, that they should constantly endeavour to form their whole conduct by a respect to the future judgment, which will be dispensed according to the gospel, to the law of liberty, *so speak ye, and so do, as they who shall be judged by the law of liberty.* It ought never to be imagined that the liberty, wherewith Christ hath made us free, was intended to weaken the obligations of our duty, or take away the binding

binding force of the divine precepts which S E R M.
are indispensable. He came not to destroy the II.

law, but to fulfil it; and so far from diminishing the strength of that motive which is taken from the future judgment, on the contrary, it is established by the gospel, which declares, *that God now commandeth all men every where to repent, because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness.* This, therefore, at least, is a necessary caution insinuated in the text against the abuse of christian liberty, as if it imported an immunity from the righteous judgment of God: instead of that, the gospel has explained the nature of this judgment more fully, and asserted it more clearly, declared the impartial equity and the universality of it, with all the circumstances which can concur to render it awful to men, and induce them by the expectation of it to the practice of religion and virtue. The light of nature itself, and that work of his law which God has written in our hearts, directs us to look for a distribution of rewards and punishments hereafter, since the administration of providence, here, does not shew such a difference between the conditions of good and bad men, as we cannot reasonably doubt but the wise and righteous

SERM. ruler of the world will finally make; and

II.  our accusing and excusing thoughts are the presages of that sentence which the great lawgiver will pass upon us according to our works. But the gospel has ascertained this matter more particularly and expressly to all who believe its divine authority, as is evident from numberless passages in the Evangelists. And we see that St. *Paul*, *Rom. ii. 14—17*, having mentioned the rational arguments taken from those natural notices God has given of their duty to all men, adds in the 15th ver. this positive express declaration, explaining the manner of the judgment. *In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.* Not meaning that the gospel shall be the rule of proceeding with all men in the great day of their final accounts, which it cannot be, particularly with respect to the *Gentiles*, who never heard of christianity, and of whom he is there particularly speaking; but that the gospel has fix'd it as an important article of our belief, that God will judge every one of mankind by *Jesus Christ* according to the law they were under.

And, this certainly is a very strong argument for the practice of our duty in every particular

particular branch of it, to which purpose SERM.
the apostle here improves it. It is the II.
strongest reason why men should be careful
to obey all the commandments of God, and
so order all their words and actions as they
may hope that they shall be approv'd by him,
*since all our works shall be brought into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good or bad**; and since, as our Saviour has
taught us, *by our words we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned* †.
This is a consideration which must strike the
mind of every one who seriously attends to it,
persuading him to govern his tongue, and
to govern his life religiously; to watch over
his whole behaviour with the utmost cir-
cumspection, that so he may not be ashamed
before the great Judge at his appearing, but
may have confidence towards him. But,

Secondly, It would seem by the connexion
of the apostle's discourse, that he design'd
this particularly as a motive to candor and
charity in all our deportment towards men.
He blames the Christian *Jews* for carrying
it so partially as they did towards their Fel-
lows. The rich who came into their assem-
blies, were treated with great civility, but
the

* Eccles. xii. † Matth. xii. 37.

SERM. the poor were despised. This was a very

II. faulty respect of persons, unbecoming religious simplicity, and contrary to that royal law, as he calls it, *ver. 8. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* Certainly no one can imagine, that the outward distinctions of condition in this world should direct the measures of our regard to our neighbours : according to that law in which our whole duty to them is comprehended, since the poor, as well as the rich, partake of the same human nature, and the same gospel grace, are united, by the same bonds, in fine, are in every respect equally our neighbours, how are we justified in making a difference ? Charity is an undistinguishing principle of good offices to all men, and brotherly kindness the principle of the same good offices to all our fellow servants, and children of God our father, and fellow members of the body of Christ. Indeed, according to the religion of the *Jews*, it was otherwise, especially according to the sentiments which prevail'd among them in the last age of that dispensation. The ceremonial law made an inclosure which appropriated many of their kind offices, and their intimate fellowship, to those of their own nation. But, especially, their teachers carried this much farther

ther than ever the divine institution intended, S E R M.
for they pronounced men of other nations, II.
and religious professions, hated and accursed
of God ; therefore, worthy not of their
friendly regard, but of their aversion and
contempt. But, christianity has taken away
all such distinctions, and those restraints of
charity, which must be disagreeable to a kind
and generous temper ; it gives full scope to
the principle of benevolence, which may
now exert itself with an unconfin'd free-
dom, not narrow'd by kindreds, particular
denominations, and outward badges of di-
stinction. Christ died as a propitiation, not
for the Jews only, but the whole world,
and *gathered together into one, the children of
God who were scattered abroad.* The gospel
being, therefore, in this respect, a law of
liberty, the spirit becoming it is a large and
generous one, an extensive charity, not li-
mited by these outward and partial conside-
rations whereby men straiten the best dispo-
sitions of their own nature. According to
the law by which we expect to be judged,
so should our tempers and our actions be.
If then, the royal law of charity which re-
quires good-will and the proper expressions
of it to all men, and a hearty love, with a
peaceable affectionate behaviour towards all
men,

SERM. men, who in every place call on the name of

II.  the Lord Jesus; of whatever tongue, kindred, or nation they be, or whatever outward condition in this world; if this be the rule of judgment, what hope can profess'd christians have, what confidence towards their supreme, righteous judge, in a partial and unmerciful disposition? Will the law of liberty acquit us in confining our charity, in appropriating our respect to the rich, while we despise the poor, or in making any such distinction, indeed, any distinction which does not affect the true foundations of mutual love. Nay, the apostle adds, in the words immediately following the text, and as a sequel of it, *for he shall have judgment without mercy, who hath shewed no mercy, and mercy rejoiceth against judgment*; that is, the man whose conscience approves him as impartially charitable and merciful in his disposition, and his whole conversation, shall assure his heart before God, having confidence in the expectation of the future judgment and good hope that he shall not be condemned.

Thirdly, There is in the exhortation of the text a designed reference to the universality of our obedience, as that only which can give us hope of being acquitted in judgment.

ment. In the verses immediately preceding, SERM.
II.
the apostle states the case of a partial obe-

dience to God's law, and shews the insufficiency of it to our acceptance. *For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all. For he that said do not commit adultery, said also do not kill.* Now, *if thou committest no adultery, yet if thou killest thou art become a transgressor of the law.* The reason and the justness of this decision is very plain, since it is the same supreme authority which has enjoin'd all the commandments of the law, and forbidden all the transgressions of it, that authority is affronted, and its right violated, by disobeying any of the commandments, and by committing one transgression as well as another; for example, by murder as well as adultery; for 'tis evident, that if a respect to the will of God governs the mind of a man in any case, it ought to govern him in all cases where the will of God is equally known; and even where the substance of an action seems to be conformable to a divine precept, yet the principle cannot be available to a man's acceptance with God, unless there be a conformity in the whole tenor of his life to all the divine precepts. The same temptation, or an equally strong
one,

SERM. one, if applied, would prevail with the sinner
 II. to break the whole law, or any of its com-
 mandments, which actually prevails with
 him in the one point wherein he does offend.
 Now what is the consequence from all this?
*So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be
 judged by the law of liberty.* Let the influ-
 ence of your professed expectation of a fu-
 ture judgment by the gospel, appear in the
 whole of your Conduct, in all your works
 and words, Do not imagine, that you sa-
 tisfy the obligations of your christian cha-
 racter, or that you can maintain the well-
 grounded hope of divine acceptance at last
 by some good actions, and abstaining from
 some sins, unless you abound in every good
 work, and abstain from all kind and all ap-
 pearance of evil.

One reflection upon what has been said,
 is very obvious, and that is all I shall far-
 ther insist upon at this time, namely, liberti-
 nism in practise, or licentiousness of life, is
 so far from being included in, that it is di-
 rectly contrary to christian liberty. For
 the apostle, when he is most strictly
 pressing the observance of all God's com-
 mandments, and enforcing it by the most
 powerful of all considerations, the future
 judgment, he gives the gospel the cha-
 racter

rafter of the law of liberty ; which if SERM.
it were to be understood in this sense, that II.
it gives a licence to sin, would be perfectly
inconsistent. Nay, in the words immediately
following the text, and thro' the whole re-
maining part of the chapter, he designedly
and largely proves, that we cannot be justi-
fied before God, otherwise than by works of
righteousness, or an universal and persevering
obedience. There were some then, as there
have been at other times, who professing the
gospel, expected to be justified by the faith
of it without works, and tho' they indulg'd
themselves in wicked courses, which was
turning the grace of God into a criminal li-
berty, and into *lasciviousness*, as the Apostle
Jude speaks, and making Christ the *minister*
of sin : but, St. *James* shews the vanity of
such a pretence, and confirms his doctrine
of Justification, or final absolution in the
day of judgment, by works ; he confirms it,
Isay, by examples from the Old Testament,
such as *Rahab*, and the patriarch *Abraham*,
which might be very convincing to the Jews
who had gone into this pernicious Error.

Let us then, take care to understand our
liberty aright, and that we do not abuse it to
purposes inconsistent with its true nature and
design ;

SERM. design; which we may be sure is always
 II. done, when men take any encouragement
 from it to sin; to allow themselves in any
 works contrary to righteousness, to the fear
 of God, to purity and charity. This is a
 point in which the apostles have taken great
 care to instruct christians. *St. Paul*, indeed,
 in his epistle to the *Galatians*, shews a very
 warm zeal for liberty; he could not bear that
 any encroachment should be made upon it;
 for, when false brethren were brought in
 privily, to spie out the liberty of christians
 in order to ensnare, *and bring them into bon-*
dage, he would not give place by subjection so
much as for an hour *. Nay, when the
 apostle *Peter* thro' fear of the *Jews*, had
 gone into a separation upon the score of the
 ceremonies, requiring the observance of them
 as a condition of religious communion, and
 so compelling the Gentiles to conform to the
 customs of the *Jews*; *Paul* withstood him
 to the face, and he recommended it to
 christians, Chap. v. 1. *To stand fast in the li-*
berty wherewith Christ hath made us free;
 but in the 13th Verse, he gives this necessary
 caution, *ye have been called into liberty, only*
use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh: do
 not

* Gal. ii. 5.

not take a licence to yourselves in any vicious SERM.
practices, nor indulge corrupt affections ; II.
and let there be no animosities, no strife, nor }
envying among you, which will indeed shew
you to *be carnal and walk as men* ; but *by love*
serve one another. To the same purpose he
warns the *Corinthians* that they should not
in the use of their liberty offend against
charity, 1st epistle viii. 9. *But take heed*
least by any means this liberty of yours become
a stumbling block to them that are weak. St.
Peter, also, earnestly exhorts the converted
Jews, not to imitate the rest of their coun-
try men who committed great disorders un-
der the pretence of freedom, 1st epistle ii.
16, *as free and not using your liberty for a*
cloak of maliciousness, by an obstinate re-
sistance and contempt of lawful human au-
thority, *but as the servants of God*.

Thus let us always value our liberty as
a high privilege ; maintain, but not abuse
it ; and live in expectation of the future
judgment ; being *holy in all manner of con-*
versation *. Expecting the resurrection of the
dead, both of the just and unjust, let us, after
the example of the holy apostle, *herein ex-*
ercise ourselves to have always consciences
void of offence towards God and towards men.

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E

S E R-

* Acts xxiv. 15, 16.

S E R M O N III.

Of REPENTANCE.

Matth. iv. 17.

*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*SERM.
III.

THE kingdom of Heaven, or the kingdom of God, does usually in the New-Testament, and particularly in the discourses of our Saviour himself, signify the gospel state, that glorious model formed in the divine counsels for recovering sinful men to their duty, and restoring them to the favour of God. The Deity has a supreme unalienable right to our obedience, which necessarily results from our relation to him as the workmanship of his hands, endued with those powers which render us capable of knowing and doing his will, continually depending on him, and receiving favours from him. But when mankind had corrupted their ways, and fallen short of the glory of God, it pleased him

him by a particular interposition to favour SERM.
 some of them with a positive revelation of III.

his will, to reclaim them from their errors
 and lead them in the way to happiness.

For this end was the constitution of *Israel*
 form'd, which is significantly and justly
 called a *Theocracy*; God himself was King,
 the laws were given by him, nay, and he kept
 in his own hand the last resort of power in the
 execution. The people under that form of
 divine government, were the special favourites
 of heaven; God himself call'd them a *chosen*
nation to him, a *peculiar treasure*, a *kingdom*
of priests, and our Saviour tells us that *sal-*
vation was of the Jews. But whatever the
 special reasons might be, taken from the
genius of that people and the *circumstances*
 of the time, there was in that oeconomy a
 great mixture of ceremony and external
 pomp, which rendered it imperfect, and un-
 fit to answer the more extensive purposes of
 that grace, designed for mankind in the *ful-*
ness of time: And therefore it must give way
 to a better constitution, a new kingdom of
 grace, which God erected and put into the
 hands of his son, to be wisely and graciously
 administred by him, for turning *the disobe-*
dient to the wisdom of the just, reducing to their
 duty the rebellious, not of one, but of all

SERM. nations to whom it should be published with-

III. out distinction, and so bringing many to glory. It is the excellency of this last and best scheme, that it proposes the first great principles of religion, with an admirable plainness, it gives such instructions concerning the Deity, his moral perfections and his providence, and concerning the obligations and duties of morality, that is, of piety, temperance, righteousness, and charity, as are most answerable to the natural sentiments of mankind, and which our own hearts, if we seriously attend to them, cannot but approve; it prescribes such a pure, simple, and reasonable worship as is worthy of God to accept, and of men to perform; it declares these terms of acceptance, accommodated to the frailty of our present state, and the conscious sense we have of guilt, which gives the greatest encouragement to sinners who are willing to reform their lives and return to their duty, and at the same time, lays them under the greatest and most indispensable necessity of reforming; and it enforces our obedience to the laws of God in the strongest manner, and by the most powerful motives, having brought *life and immortality to light*, and declared, that God has * *appointed a day wherein he will judge* the

* Acts xvii. 31.

the world in righteousness by that man, whom SERM.
 he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assu- III.
 rance unto all men, in that he hath raised
 him from the dead.

This is that *kingdom of heaven* which our lord says in my text was then *at hand*, it was begun to be erected, and the model of it would soon be compleated; and that men might be the qualified approved subjects of it, and entitled to the great salvation it proposes, he exhorts them to *repent*. I shall at this time, *first*, consider the duty of repentance, and then, lay before you some motives to the practice of it. Surely, this, if any thing in christianity, is of importance to men. The whole strain of the New-Testament shews it to be of absolute necessity. The most important consequences depend upon it. The great author of our religion has told us that * *except we repent we shall perish*. After the resurrection of Christ, the apostles filled with the holy ghost, pressed it upon men in this manner, *repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out*, Acts iii. 19. The great doctrines of christianity, which are declared to be of its very essence, do all point to it as their proper improvement. The death of Christ is represented as calling upon us to be *crucified* with him, to *mortify the*

E 3

deeds

* Luke xiii. 3.

SERM. *deeds of the body, and to be renewed in the*
 III. *spirit of our minds, that is to repent.* And
 that future judgment which God has appointed, and the declaration and assurance of which is a peculiar glory of the gospel, strongly enforces the same exhortation. These considerations will, I hope, engage your attention to that first and great instruction which our Saviour gave to the world.

The original word which is generally used in the New Testament for repentance, does properly signify *a change of mind*, and very agreeable it is to the nature of the thing; for that religious repentance which God enjoins, and peremptorily insists on as the condition of forgiveness, and our obtaining his favour, is a change of our dispositions from evil to good, and as the genuine fruit of it, the amendment of our lives. The gospel supposes men to have universally *sinned and come short of the glory of God*, nay, it declares that those to whom the great salvation was first offered, both Jews and Gentiles, were very corrupt. Among the Jews religion had degenerated into empty form, and trifling ceremonies were substituted in the place of substantial godliness and virtue. Under a specious shew of outward sanctity was covered reigning impiety,

impiety, pride, and covetousness. The SERM. heathen were deep sunk in all manner of III. wickedness, in adultery, fornication, lasciviousness, revelling, drunkenness, unnatural contentions and animosities. Such were the persons whom Christ and his apostles called to repent, that is, to change their inclinations and tempers, to unlearn their vitious habits, to *bring forth fruits meet for amendment of life*, to become lovers of God and men, to *worship God in spirit and truth*, to be sober, patient, meek, humble, just, and merciful.

This is what the first teachers of christianity mean by repentance, which they so earnestly and frequently inculcate, and they sometimes represent it by different notions, but which amount to the same thing in effect; as, by *conversion to God*, that is, whereas men were in a vile subjection to sins, serving diverse lusts and pleasures, they renounce the tyrannical usurpation of those *other lords who have had dominion over them*, and yield themselves to God as their only rightful Lord, to *walk in his ways, and to keep his Commandments*. Sometimes it is represented under the images of a *new creation*, and a *resurrection or revival from death*; which signify that important moral change in

SERM. the tempers and manners of men, when,
III. from a doleful depravity, wherein reason and
conscience, and all the best sentiments and
affections of human nature, seem to be lost
or asleep, and all the designs and pursuits of
men are directed by selfish inferior appetites,
or contracted vitious propensities; when, I say,
from this wretched degeneracy they are re-
covered to the love and practice of *the things
that are pure, and true, and just, and vene-
rable, and virtuous; to seek the things that
are above, to approve the good and acceptable,
and perfect will of God, and to walk in new-
ness of life.* These representations shew the
efficacy of the gospel and the grace of God,
for effecting such a change in men; but as
it is all a voluntary change, wherein their
own natural powers actively exert themselves,
the whole is comprehended under the duty
of Repentance. Still it is to be remember'd,
that the essence of repenting, consists in pre-
vailing good inclinations, contrary to the
evil ones which had the ascendant before,
and good works directly opposite to those
wicked ones of which sinners had been
guilty. Thus, *John Baptist* who first de-
clared the coming of God's kingdom, and
taught the doctrine of repentance for the
remission of sins, when, having in general,
exhorted

exhorted his hearers to repent, they asked SERM. him more particularly what he meant by it, III. and what he would have them to do, explains it thus, *Luke iii.* from ver. 11. accommodating his exhortation to their various circumstances; the common people he directed, instead of outward ceremonies and forms, in which the religion of that time chiefly consisted, to abound in works of substantial piety and charity, and to give out of their plenty for the relief of their indigent fellow-creatures; the collectors of taxes, called *Publicans*, he exhorted to perform what was given them in charge justly and mercifully, never extorting from any man more than what the due and faithful discharge of their trust required; and the soldiers, that they should not behave themselves insolently and oppressively, but *be content with their wages*. This was the Baptist's doctrine of repentance, and it may very easily, by parity of reasons, be applied to all the various relations, circumstances, and conditions in human life. In general, let men forsake their wicked ways and unrighteous doings, and turn to the Lord, practising the virtues which are contrary to their former vices. And in particular, *Let him that stole, steal no more*; let him that has been covetous, break

SERM. break off his sins by *shewing mercy to the*
 III. *poor* ; let the lewd and voluptuous become
 chaste and temperate ; the wrathful and
 contentious *put on bowels of mercies, humbleness of mind, forbearing and forgiving the*
 weak and the injurious ; in fine, let us * *put off the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.* All the sacred writers with one consent, continually urge men to this, as the only effectual way to obtain reconciliation with God, and the remission of all their sins. The prophets under the Old Testament insist upon it as well as Christ and his apostles, assuring the *Jews*, that without it all their sacrifices and other external rites would be unavailable to their acceptance with God ; that indeed God was ready to forgive their iniquities ; *though their sins were as scarlet, and red like crimson, he would make them white as snow and wool* ; but it is upon the condition of their *washing and making them clean, putting away the evil of their doings, ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well* ||. No more taking pleasure in their former sinful courses, rigorously exacting the labours and services of the poor, and grinding

* Ephes. iv. 22, 24. || Isaiah i. 16. 18.

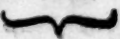
grinding their faces by oppression, but dealing their bread to the hungry, and cloathing the naked ||: in short, exercising themselves

S E R M.
III.

universally in the works of true piety and righteousness. Sorrow for sin, and what is called contrition, humiliation for having offended God, and perverted that which is right; the confessing of our iniquities with shame and grief, and pious virtuous inclinations, a desire to become holy as God is holy; all these are necessary to repentance, but it is a fatal mistake to imagine, that it essentially consists, and is compleated in any, or all of them; or, that any thing will be accepted without what I have already mentioned, a thorough and effectual forsaking all sin, and turning to God, and to the practice of our duty, universally. These preparatory exercises and dispositions of the mind, arise from the reason of things, and the very frame of our nature. As repentance is the rational exercise of the soul, wherein its intellectual and active powers are deliberately employed, what first and naturally occurs to the reflecting thoughts of a penitent, is, his former conduct; and he cannot review it otherwise than with an ingenuous remorse and self-abhorrence. When a Man considers

SERM. ders that he has done wrong, it is impossible
 III. to avoid a deep concern ; for it is the highest
 pleasure to be justified to our selves, and the
 reproaches of a self-accusing heart are most
 painful ; and this is the best and most effect-
 tual preservative from a relapse into former
 follies. * *Sorrow after a godly sort*, as the
 apostle says, is naturally productive of *fear*,
 and *zeal*, and *carefulness* ; *fear* of offending
 God for the future, a *zeal* and *care* to please
 him in all things. And as this is the true found-
 ation of repentance, that it may be firm
 and stable, nothing is more necessary for us
 to attend to, than that our *sorrow* be of the
 kind I just now mentioned, *after a godly*
sort. There may be a grief even for sin,
 which is of another character ; that is, when
 the penal and pernicious consequences of it
 only are considered, especially, the disgrace
 and the miseries to which it exposes sinners
 in this world. Such a sorrow is really no
 more than a painful sense of natural evil or
 unhappiness ; and if sin is only considered,
 as the occasion of that, without entering into
 its moral deformity, we can never imagine
 that sorrow arising thence, has any thing in
 it of that ingenuous remorse which is accept-
 able to God ; or that it will produce, or in-
 deed

* 2 Cor. vii. 9---11.

deed at all tends to, a real amendment. But, **SERM.**
 the mind that grieves after a godly sort dwells **III.**
 on the consideration of sin as it is in itself, 
 and in the lights wherein the scripture sets
 it; it considers moral evil as an error, as un-
 becoming the rational nature, as a deviation
 from the eternal and unchangeable measures
 of right, as offensive to, and disapproved
 by, the best of all beings, as ingratitude to
 a benefactor who continually loads us with
 his favours, and exercises towards us the most
 amazing patience and tender compassion;
 to all which the gospel adds, that most
 powerful motive taken from the death and
 passion of Christ. Our glorious redeemer
 was, as the prophet speaks of him, *a man*
of sorrows and acquainted with grief †; and
 after a life of deep humiliation, poverty and
 contempt, endured a most ignominious and
 painful death. And, when we remember
 that he suffered and past through all his scenes
 of grief for our sakes, *that he might redeem*
us from all our iniquities, and purify to him-
self a peculiar people zealous of good works *;
 and finally bring us to the possession of an
 eternal rest and blessedness in heaven; when
 I say, all this is considered, it must be a hard
 heart that does not relent, that can look to
 him

† Isa. liii. 3.

* Titus ii. 14.

SERM. *him that was pierced for our sins, and not*
 III. *mourn and be in bitterness.*

It is likewise very natural for men convinced, and sensibly affected with the remembrance of their transgressions, to confess them to God whom they have offended. Nature dictates a way of expressing our sorrows, and reason tells us that sorrow for injuries done, should be uttered in acknowledgements to the person injured. We are very ready to expect and demand it when wrong is done *us*, and can we question the equity of paying it when our hearts tells us *we* have done wrong ; especially, this homage is due to the supreme being, when we have affronted and provoked him by violating his righteous laws. The confession of sin is a reproaching ourselves in the bitterness of our spirits, as polluted by the most nauseous and loathsome thing, which we can no longer bear. It is, as the scripture speaks, *taking to ourselves shame, and confusion of face*, and justifying God whom our transgressions dishonoured, making a solemn acknowledgement of the reasonableness of his laws, and the righteousness of the sentence which he has pronounced against the evil deeds of men. At the same time, it gives glory to his mercy and the truth of his promise,

mise, that he will *pardon iniquity, transgression, and sin*; the hope of which, far from lessening the malignity of sin, in the view of a penitent, it increases it rather, as the prophet says, in the name of the Lord. *Ezekiel xvi. 63. Thou shalt remember, and be ashamed and confounded, and never open thy mouth, because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done.* For these reasons, the confession of sin is often enjoin'd in scripture, and great promises are made to the sincere performance of it; yet the stress is not laid on the performance itself, but the value of it depends on its tendency to a reformation, which, chiefly, is well-pleasing to God.

The result will certainly be a change of mind and affections from evil to good, a disposition to alter our course of action; for it is altogether an inconsistent supposition, that we should be sorry for having offended, and acknowledge it with shame, at the same time resolving that we will continue in the same course. But still all these are only preparations for repentance, it is not finish'd in them. It's true characteristic is a deliberate and resolved change of temper and behaviour; a firm purpose of amendment thoroughly executed; resolving to *keep God's righteous judgments,*

SERM. *ments*, and immediately entering upon the
 III. actual performance of it ; no more *fashioning*
 ourselves according to the former lusts in ignorance, but as he that hath called us is holy, becoming holy in all manner of conversation*.

To convince us of this, which I take to be a point of very great moment ; let us, *first*, consider the express declarations of scripture concerning it. The apostle *Paul* discoursing of godly sorrow, (and certainly none can have a better character, it comprehends every good qualification of sorrow for sin) says †, *it worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of* ; not that it is repentance unto salvation, for he maketh a plain difference as between the means and the end ; the occasion or preparation and the effect. Besides, in a great many other passages, a pious and virtuous life, a persevering obedience and *patient continuance in well doing*, is the condition of our obtaining eternal life ; which indeed is contained in repentance, but not in sorrow, confession of sin, or good inclinations. On the other hand, a vicious character and wicked behaviour, disqualifies men for the kingdom of God, whatever their griefs, humiliations, and pious desires,
 and

* 1 Pet. i. 15. † 2 Cor. vii. 10.

and purposes may be. The † *adulterer*, the *SERM.*
forcerer, the *railer*, the *covetous*, the *drunk-* III.
ard, *shall not inherit the kingdom of God*,
 tho' they should often with deep humility
 and regret confess their sins, and in their con-
 fessions and griefs incline and resolve to alter
 their course of life ; yet they do it not, *but*
it happens to them according to the proverb,
 as St. Peter expresses it, || *The dog is turned*
to his own vomit again ; and the sow that was
washed, to her wallowing in the mire.

I think no attentive person can doubt but
 this is the doctrine of the holy scriptures
 upon the head of repentance ; at least, that
 a virtuous course of life, *ordering our con-*
versations aright, being *undefiled in the way*,
walking in the law of the Lord, doing no
iniquity, and keeping God's precepts diligently,
 is absolutely and indispensably necessary to
 our being blessed in enjoying the favour of
 God. It is a wonder that any christians
 should have gone into other sentiments, some
 even in speculation and opinion, many more
 in the secret fond presumption of their hearts,
 not supported by any avowed principle, ima-
 gining that humiliation, and contrition, and
 ineffectual purposes of amendment, would
 at last be sufficient to their acceptance with

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F

God.

† 1 Cor. vi. 9.

|| 2 Pet. ii. 22.

SERM. God. If it were true, that repentance consists in these things, yet is it not evident from a multitude of scripture declarations, indeed from the intire strain of them, that a good life according to the mercy of the gospel covenant, that is, sincere prevailing, though imperfect holiness in all manner of conversation, is the condition of eternal life? and therefore to understand the gospel consistently, we must conclude, that either repentance is not sufficient of itself, to entitle to forgiveness and acceptance with God, or a persevering conformity to the divine law is included in it, which seems to be the juster explanation.

But, we may be farther satisfied, that repentance, as the term of forgiveness and reconciliation to God, does not consist wholly in these particulars already mentioned, by trusting to which many deceive themselves; we may, I say, be satisfied of this, by considering the reason of the thing; for, in the *first* place, it cannot be reasonably thought that God has any delight in the sorrow of his creatures, meerly for its own sake, because, that is contrary to his perfect goodness, which takes pleasure in the happiness of all beings who are capable of it; and the scripture tells us, that he delights in the

the prosperity and joy of his servants. If S E R M.
we could at all suppose that the griefs of sin- III.

ners are pleasing to the Deity, as separated from the proper effect of them in their reformation ; then still the more intense their griefs are, the more pleasing they would be, and consequently the hopeless anguish of the accursed objects of his wrath, would, as being the bitterest and the most painful, be the most acceptable, the howlings of the damned be more grateful in his ears, than the ingenuous mournings of the penitent, which every one will judge to be absurd. Let us put the case of a human superior who has bowels of compassion ; will he take any pleasure in the sorrows of an offending subject any farther than as they are the salutary presages of amendment ? Will a father delight in the piercing griefs of his child, or even a judge in the affliction of a malefactor ? No otherwise, certainly, than as their future obedience may be thereby secured. We ought not, then, to think that the best of all beings, the most merciful father even of his prodigal children, the most compassionate judge, who does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men, will regard with pleasure and approbation, the deepest sorrows and humiliations of sinners on any

SERM. other account, than as they are means in
 III. order to the end which he certainly approves,
 { the bettering of their hearts, and reforming
 their conversations ; and therefore we must
 conclude, that the repentance which God
 accepts is not consummated, nor principally
 consists, in sorrow for sin.

Secondly, The same judgment is to be made of confession, in which our penitence must not rest, nor will God approve it unless it end in the forsaking of sin ; which *Solomon* comprehends in the condition of our obtaining mercy. *Prov. xxviii. 13. He that covereth his sin, shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh shall have mercy.* I do not speak here only of a formal acknowledgment in words, which without the sincere and ingenuous contrition of the heart, cannot be pleasing to God, for it is hypocrisy ; but, let us suppose it ever so serious, and accompanied with the deepest remorse and self-abasement, it is only so far valuable as it terminates in holiness of heart and life. Consider how we would judge in a parallel case of our own. Suppose a child, a servant, a friend, or a neighbour, is guilty of a trespass, and makes profession of grief for it ; humanity and christian charity require us to
 forgive

forgive the wrong ; but it is always taken for granted, that the injurious shall not relapse into his former offences, but that his future conduct shall be just, respectful, and obliging ; when it happens otherwise, and the conduct continues uninfluenced, and as bad as before, a repetition in that case of such fruitless professions is in itself offensive, and rather serves to heighten the provocation ; and, if it be so, we cannot but imagine that God will count it an indignity, if his sinful creatures treat him after the same manner ; if after many provocations, they, in order to obtain his favour, only make a confession of their guilt, and instead of forsaking their evil ways, return to them again.

And, in the *last* place, the dispositions and purposes of the mind will be unavailable, and are not true repentance unless they are followed with a suitable practice. Let us judge in this case as we do in all others concerning the abilities, the qualities, the accomplishments, natural and moral, of the human soul. Reason itself, the distinguishing excellence of our nature, is discovered only by our conduct ; if a creature in human shape should show by its actions no other faculties than those which belong to the brutal kind, it could not be acknowledged

SERM. to be of our species. But, particularly, in
III. determining characters and qualities of men,
we have always a recourse to their behaviour. Thus we distinguish between a wise man and a fool, between just and unjust, between grateful and ungrateful, between a friend and an enemy ; for these are never considered as, nor indeed are they in their own nature, idle, unactive qualities, resting in the mind. Dispositions are in order to action, and have a necessary relation to it, particular dispositions to particular courses of action and without them, are to all intents and purposes to be considered as if they had no being.

After the same manner let us judge of repentance, considered as a disposition in the mind. To what is it a disposition ? surely to obedience, to the expressions of love and gratitude to God and hatred of sin, to a course of action opposite to the former which is now repented of. Without that obedience, therefore, those expressions of love and gratitude to God, and hatred of sin, and without that change of our course of action, it must be accounted empty and void. The sinner very well knows how his former dispositions, he now pretends to repent of, and to have changed, exerted themselves ; they
were

were not unactive, they produced a multi-^{S E R M.}
tude of transgressions, not in thought only, ^{III.}
but in word and deed ; and shall not his now
contrary repenting dispositions, inclinations,
and purposes, exert themselves in the con-
trary works ?

But, let us lay ever so great stress on all these particulars which are ingredients in repentance, or rather preparations for it, and tendencies towards it, on sorrows for sin, deep contrition, confessions and pious dispositions, religious inclinations and purposes, let us even make the supposition, that the essence of repentance were in them, this important question will remain, how does their sincerity appear? It is an acknowledg'd principle, that nothing called religion can be acceptable to the Deity, let it be faith, repentance, obedience, charity, or whatsoever virtue or good work so called, it cannot, I say, be acceptable without being sincere. Now, let any one judge whether there can be in the nature of the thing any evidence, without good works, or *fruits meet for the amendment of life*, as the scripture calls them, of these inward dispositions and affections, religious inclinations and purposes, or of godly sorrow for sin, or any satisfying

F 4

evidence

SERM. evidence that men are sincere in confessing
 III. their sins.

Nay, upon the unhappy supposition that our repentance is thus imperfect, that we are sorry for our sins, confess them, and purpose to reform, without actually reforming ; our guilt is thereby greatly aggravated, and the *separation between us and our God*, which our iniquities have made, is increased. I do not now put the case of insincerity, which is always displeasing to that God who *loves truth in the inward parts*, but allowing that men really, and in earnest are grieved for their transgressions, and confess them with deep contrition of soul ; upon that supposition, if it can be made, without amendment of life, the sins in which they continue are very much heightened, because they are committed against the plainest and most sensible connections of their own minds, and still the affront to God is the greater, the more it is done in defiance of light, and with our eyes open.

I cannot now finish what I intended in this discourse, and shall for this time conclude with exhorting you to consider seriously,

riously, the absolute, indispensable necessity, of breaking off your sins by actual thorough amendment ; by *turning our feet to God's testimonies, making haste to keep his commandments* *. Which that we may all sincerely do, God of his infinite mercy grant.

* Psalm cxix. 60.

S E R.

S E R M O N I V.

O F R E P E N T A N C E.

Matth. iv. 17.

*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*S E R M.
I V.

IN a former discourse from these words, I endeavoured to explain the nature of that true repentance, which the scripture declares to be so absolutely and indispensably necessary to our acceptance with God. And what I intend at this time principally to insist on, are, the motives whereby this most important duty is urg'd upon us. But one observation will *first* be usefully made in order to our understanding it better, and applying what is said concerning it with greater advantage to our selves, that is, concerning the difference between the repentance originally preach'd to finners, both Jews and Heathens, as the condition of their entrance into the christian state, and that which

is

is required of those who sin wilfully under S E R M.
the christian profession. The gospel was IV.
first declared to such as, by the account it
gives of them, were very ignorant and very
wicked ; *all flesh had corrupted their ways,*
and the whole world became guilty before God.
The religion of the Jews had degenerated
into empty formality ; external rites and ce-
remonies, were put in the place of substan-
tial piety and virtue : And the Gentiles were
dead in trespasses and sins, foolish and disobe-
dient, serving diverse lusts and pleasures.
Such were they whom our Saviour and his
apostles called to repentance, to an entire
change of their tempers and their manner of
life, to become new creatures, to *put off the*
old man and be renewed after the image of
God, in righteousness and true holiness. To
this purpose very strong motives were set be-
fore them, taken from the death and resur-
rection of Christ, and from the hope of a
glorious immortality, which Jesus Christ
brought to light ; and they came under a
solemn obligation by baptism, which was a
seal of their religious profession, and a sacred
engagement upon them *to walk in newness of*
life, as the apostles explain it. A perse-
vering course of sincere obedience, as the
condition of their claim to the benefits of
the

SERM. the new covenant, was what all the follow-

IV.  ers of Christ were understood to be bound to, as the genuine effect, I may say, the continuation of that repentance which was begun at their conversion to christianity, and into which they were initiated at their baptism. This repentance was supposed, when once sincerely begun, never to be revoked, nor to need to be repeated, as the apostle speaks, 2 Cor. vii. 10. *not to be repented of*; as the seal of it was never to be received but once; and therefore, in the 6th chapter to the *Hebrews*, repentance from dead works, as well as faith, and in consequence of both, baptism is reckon'd as the foundation of christianity not to be laid again.

To suppose men called to repent in the same manner as at their first professing the religion of Christ, is to suppose that the foundation is destroy'd, that in effect they have departed from christianity, and renounced their baptism; thus falling from grace and returning to that state of *death in trespasses and sins* wherein the world lay, like the unconverted Gentiles who walked in the *vanity of their minds*, and according to their *former lusts in ignorance*; and this is a supposition which is not made in the general
strain

strain of the New Testament writings, (as SERM. it was not reasonable it should) they are, IV. therefore, to be understood in treating of repentance, to mean the first conversion of sinners, by the grace of God that brings salvation, *from dead idols to the service of the living God*; from an impious and immoral conversation in worldly lusts, to a sober righteous and godly life; in which they are bound by the laws of their religion and their covenant with God to persevere and go on to perfection. Its true, christians are in some sense oblig'd daily to repent; that is, whereas this is an imperfect state, and they are liable to failures thro' surprizing temptations, remaining ignorance, and many infirmities which compass them about, they ought continually by impartial self-examination to find out these failings, to regret them humbly, and set themselves in opposition to them, aspiring to higher measures of perfection, *leaving the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before as the * Apostle speaks*. But, this is not what the sacred writers mean by repentance, but becoming new creatures, turning from a wicked and ungodly life to a sincere holiness and virtue; and their doctrine is, that sincere christians
being

* Philip iii. 13, 14.

SERM. being born of God, born of water and of
 IV. the Spirit, that is, truly repenting and being
 baptized, they do not, they cannot sin, because the *divine seed abides in them*; they do not commit sin, so as to be its servants, and under its dominion any more.

Nevertheless, it is a case which may be supposed, for it is sometimes fact, and the inspired writers themselves affirm it to be so, that men under the profession of the gospel fall into those courses, and into these practices which are utterly inconsistent with sincerity; *they * sin wilfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, and depart from the holy commandment which was delivered unto them.* Not only an open and avowed rejecting of christianity, which some in the primitive times were guilty of, and it was extremely difficult to renew them again unto repentance; not only this, I say, but any wilful, deliberate sinning against the light and conviction of men's own minds, any known criminal practices frequently repeated, any of those things *for the sake of which the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience*, as adultery, fornication, drunkenness, fraud, violence, oppression, or others of a like nature and malignity, any of them knowingly

* Heb. x. 26.

knowingly and wilfully committed, especially relapsed into, after professed sorrow and purposes of amendment, is a violation of the christian covenant, a forfeiture of our claim to the favour of God according to the laws of the gospel, and subjects sinners to his indignation. What in this case is to be done? I have said already these are not the persons to whom the doctrine of repentance was originally preached, nor to whose condition it is accommodated in the general strain of the New Testament. Indeed their condition is much worse, their guilt is more aggravated by such bold and presumptuous defiance to the light of their own consciences, and contempt of the gospel grace; the spirit of God is grieved, their hearts more hardened, and their reformation rendered more difficult, as *St. Peter* says, 2d epist. ii. 21. *It were better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it to turn from the holy commandment.*

But after all there is no other remedy; repent they must or perish. Tho' the scripture speaks but sparingly of their case, and of that duty with an application to it, as it is not reasonable such ample encouragement should be given to them as to those who

SERM. finn'd in ignorance, and whose sins were in
 IV. some sense connived at, yet the plain reason
 of the case will direct them to this, as the
 only way for obtaining forgiveness and sal-
 vation, notwithstanding all the disadvantages
 they have brought themselves under, and
 all the disabilities they have contracted for
 performing it. And yet the scripture is not
 wholly silent concerning this case, and the
 necessity, and even the hopefulness of re-
 penting in it. The prophets often call upon
 the Jews (whose condition in this respect
 was parallel to that of christians) in such
 terms as these, ** return ye blacksliding chil-
 dren, for I am married to you.* The cove-
 nant on God's part shall still stand, if ye will
 forsake the sins by which you have violated
 it and revolted from him; and *† tho' thou
 hast plaid the harlot with many lovers, yet re-
 turn to me saith the Lord.* That is, for so
 the figurative expression signifies, tho' thou
 art guilty of heinous aggravated offences,
 and particularly of idolatry, which was an
 essential breach of the covenant, yet there
 is room for repentance. And in the New
 Testament, as we find the case of apostacy
 supposed, or of insincerity, that is of wilful
 transgressions under the christian profession
 and

* Jer. iii. 14.

† Jer. iii. 1.

and the wrath of God denounced against it, SERM.
 which is principally intended for the admo-^{*} IV.
 nition of christians, that they do not fall in-
 to such sin; yet a reserve for the repentance
 of those who are so guilty is not obscurely
 insinuated. The apostle *Paul* refers to a
 fact of this sort which happened among the
 Corinthians. One, and probably a teacher
 of no inconsiderable character, was guilty
 of such fornication as was not named even
 among the Gentiles, ** that a man should have
 his father's wife.* Because the example was
 of a very infectious nature, and highly re-
 proachful to christianity, it was necessary
 that it should be censured with a peculiar
 severity; accordingly, the apostle, by virtue
 of his extraordinary miraculous power, de-
 livered the offender to *satan*, meaning, that
 some uncommon temporal judgment was
 inflicted upon him. But what was the in-
 tention? was it that he should be immedi-
 ately overwhelmed and swallowed up in reme-
 diless ruin? no, *but for † the destruction of
 the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the
 day of Jesus Christ.* That is, that the sin-
 ner might be restored to a good state, and
 the hope of eternal life by repentance. And,

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therefore,

* 1. Cor. v. 1.

† 1. Cor. v. 5.

SERM. therefore, when the punishment had its due

IV. effect in the humiliation and repentance of
 the offender, the apostle exhorts the saints
 at Corinth to comfort him as a penitent, and
 receive him again into their fellowship. In
 the epistles to the seven churches of *Asia*,
Revel. chap. 2 d, and 3 d, some are charged,
 with great defection, and the divine displea-
 sure is denounced against them, they are
 threatned with the *removal of their candle-*
stick out of its place, and other punishments;
 but still upon the supposition of impenitency;
 and it is expressly declared, that if they did
 repent, their destruction should be prevented.
Nay, some of the most notorious transgres-
 sors, who seduced the servants of Christ in-
 to grossly immoral practices, are threatned
 indeed with death, but it is, *except they*
repent. The apostle *Peter* himself is an ex-
 ample for the encouragement of offending
 disciples of Christ to repent; thro' fear he
 denied his master before men, for which
 sin his master pronounces a severe punish-
 ment; but he obtained mercy, having with
 deep sorrow for his sin returned to a better
 mind and better resolution, which he testi-
 fied thro' the whole course of his after life,
 and even at his death.

There

There is, therefore, repentance also *grant-* SERM.
ed even to them who professing christianity IV.
have deliberately and presumptuously sinned
against its laws ; and their repentance is of
the same kind with that which the gospel
describes in the case of converted infidels :
a thorough forsaking, and *purging the con-*
science from dead works, to serve the living
God, sprinkling the hearts from an evil con-
science, and washing the body with pure
water. Let them never imagine that their
condition is any thing the better for their
having been christians before the committing
of their iniquities, and that from thence
there remains any foundation of hope for
them ; their habitual course of wickedness
utterly inconsistent with integrity, forfeits
the christian character, and with it all claim
to the privileges of the gospel covenant.
Their state is that of a total alienation
from God ; and their conversion to him,
that it may be sincere and acceptable, must
be attended with an entire change of dis-
position and conversation, from evil to good :
As *David* in his penitential exercises, after
the most heinous transgression of his life,
addresses God, not only with a deprecation
of his displeasure for that particular offence,

SERM. nor indeed, only, with a desire and purpose

IV. of amending it, but with the utmost sol-
 citude that he might be wholly renewed;
 in the same manner as a new convert to re-
 ligion would do, after an universally profligate and abandoned life *according to his lusts in ignorance, * create in me a clean heart, O Lord, and renew a right spirit within me.* Nay, if there be any difference, it is this, that the repentance of such sinners ought to be peculiarly remarkable and conspicuous, as their iniquities have been accompanied with peculiar aggravations; and, especially, let it be remembred, that nothing can be to them a satisfying evidence of their sincerity, but an effectual amendment, an intire, resolved, abstinence from their former iniquities, and the steddy exercise of the contrary virtues.

I come, in the next place, to lay before you the gospel motives to repentance. But, before I enter upon them, it may not be amiss to consider a little the reasonableness of the thing itself, and its agreeableness to our natural sentiments. We have indeed this invaluable advantage by the gospel revelation, that it adds new and very powerful inducements

* Psalm li. 10.

inducements to our obeying the eternal and SERM.
immutable laws of God; but still the first IV.
consideration which takes fast hold on the
minds of men, is, that the things which
those laws injoin are excellent and right
things, most becoming a reasonable nature,
and tending to its perfection, and its highest
self enjoyment.

Now, I think it will appear to every attentive person very rational and fit, that we should undo what we have done amiss; that if we have gone into any wrong course, we should not persevere in it, but upon conviction abandon it; that we should renounce our errors, and if we have done iniquity, resolve that we will do it no more; that is, that we should repent. It is true, indeed, that repentance is not directly contained in the original obligation of the law of nature, for it primarily enjoins what is good without supposing the case of a departure from it; but in the event of sin, it imports a plain consequential obligation to forsake it, and return to our duty, as being that only which we can reasonably do in such circumstances, and whereby we can only have hope towards God, or be approved by ourselves.

SERM. But, *if the times of ignorance God winked at, he now commands all men every where to repent*; having published his law of grace and that remedy which his mercy had found out for sinners. The kingdom of heaven is come, that new gospel constitution wherein the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; he has declared himself merciful to the unrighteousness of the penitent, and that their sins and transgressions he will remember no more. That law which is the unalterable rule of right is cleared from the obscurities in which the ignorance and prejudices of men had involved it; there is a full discovery of that which is good and acceptable to the Deity, and he has ascertained a glorious reward to them who diligently seek him.

From this general character of the kingdom of heaven, or of christianity, you will see that it contains very strong motives to repentance. The first I mention, is taken from the hope of success. This is the greatest encouragement, and does most effectually determine men to any valuable design, endeavours, or pursuit. The end is obtaining the favour of God, which is of so great moment, that one would think men should exert

ert their utmost power, and use the greatest S E R M. 2
diligence for it, considering themselves as IV.
guilty, and under a forfeiture. The impres- }

sion of this has been so strong on the minds
of men, that all nations, sensible of having
offended the Deity, have laboured to appease
him, tho' for the most part by methods
very disagreeable to reason, and to our most
natural notions of the supreme Being. Re-
pentance, indeed, is what the light of nature
dictates, and all men who consider it, are
convinced it is absolutely necessary to a re-
conciliation; but an express assurance from
God, that it will be accepted, must be ac-
knowledged an invaluable advantage; and
this we have by the christian revelation.
For however the divine goodness manifested
by its liberal effects, and extending to all
kinds of beings who are capable objects of
it, might induce us to hope that God will
be favourable to penitents, and make a dif-
ference between the obstinately wicked and
imperfectly good, who in the general tenor
of their actions sincerely do what is lawful
and right, tho' not without a mixture of in-
firmities; yet, still there might remain a
suspicion that the wise governor of the
world might see it fit to inflict some degrees

SERM. of punishment in a future state on those

IV. who sinned in this life, even altho' they have repented. But this anxiety is superseded, and strong consolation is provided for penitents, by a positive declaration from a person who has a plenary authority sufficiently attested, that God will receive them into favour as if they had never sinned, and that there is reserved for them a compleat and eternal felicity hereafter.

The method in which this mercy is dispensed carries in it very strong arguments to enforce our duty, I mean, repentance and its genuine fruits. It is by the mediation of Christ; by the shedding of his blood, * *they are made near to God, who were far off*; and he † *was raised from the dead for their justification, saving to the uttermost all that come to God by him, because he ever lives to make intercession for them* ‡. Now, this lays us under the most endearing obligation of gratitude to our Saviour, *who gave himself for us, to redeem us from all our || iniquities, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works*. The New Testament writers so represent both the death and resurrection of Christ,

* Ephes. ii. 13. † Rom. iv. 25. ‡ Heb. vii. 25.

|| Tit. ii. 14.

Christ, as it appears to be their great design SERM.
to bring sinners to repentance, or to amend- IV.
ment and newness of life. *We are buried*

with him in baptism unto death, (saith St. Paul, Rom. vi. 4.) that as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the father, so we should walk in newness of life. And thus he reasons, 2d of Cor. v. 14, 15. the love of Christ constraineth us because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all once dead, that they that live should no more live to themselves, but to him that died for them and rose again. In his other epistles he speaks often in the same strain, and to the same effect, describing our repentance as the very image and resemblance of Christ's crucifixion and rising to glory, for he calls it being crucified and rising with him, putting off the body of the sins of the flesh thro' the faith of the operation of God, and putting on the new man, and being renewed in the spirit of our minds. The same doctrine is taught by St. Peter, 1st ep. iv. 1. Forasmuch as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind; for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin.

Another argument for repentance because the kingdom of God, or christianity is come, is taken from the clear light of the gospel;
and

SERM. and certainly a great weight is added to the

IV. obligation of our duty by the full and plain discovery of it; in effect the revelation of our whole duty is in this view the enforcement of repentance, which is nothing else but the practice of whatsoever is good, and pure, and virtuous, in opposition to *former lusts in ignorance. The former times God winked at, but now commands all men to repent.* He had great compassion for them who lived in times of error, who were very ill taught, and received a corrupt conversation by tradition of their fathers, without any means of delivering themselves, but merely their own reason, which indeed, if duely attended to, might have discovered the folly and wickedness of the idolatry and immorality which then prevailed, but in the generality of men was so weak and unimprov'd, thro' the unhappiness of their education, that it had very little influence; and its feeble effects were easily overborn by the clamor of imposture, prejudices, and vicious customs. But, now, that God has sent his son into the world to reveal his will to mankind, and he has done it with such perspicuity that he *who runs may read*, and understand it, they must be inexcusable who continue impenitent

tent and disobedient; * and the servant, who SERM.
 knowing his Lord's will, does not prepare IV.
 himself to do it, will deserve to be beaten with
 many stripes.

I may add, under this head, the gracious assistance which the gospel affords that men may be led to repentance. It is the glory of christianity to be the *ministration of the spirit*. Not only was the holy Ghost sent down from heaven to attest it by miraculous gifts and operations at first, but the divine comforter abides always with the followers of Christ, to instruct them, to lead them in the way of truth, and incline them to the practice of their duty. Now as all their obedience is summed up in repentance, from which consolation naturally arises, and to the increase whereof it tends, the operations of the Holy Spirit may be said to have this for their end. The prophet *Zechariah* foretelling the glory of the last days, or of the christian dispensation when the most perfect model of religion should take place, and real piety and virtue should flourish, says chap. xii. 10. *It shall come to pass saith the Lord, that I will pour on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications,*

* Luke xii. 47.

SERM. cations, and they shall look upon me whom they

VI. have pierced, and they shall mourn and be
in bitterness. The Holy Spirit then pour'd

out abundantly shall incline men to repent, and from a sense of their former sins, to renounce them with abhorrence, and do no more wickedly. When such aids are offer'd to us, and the Spirit of God strives, in order to reclaim and reform us, it must be a high aggravation of wickedness to resist him, and by such hardness and * impenitence of heart men treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. What more cou'd have been done on God's part that he has not done? he not only calls upon us by the voice of reason and nature, which loudly proclaims his glory and our duty; and exercises great patience and long suffering towards us; nay, he not only has appointed a propitiation for our sins, and thereby given us the most solemn and satisfying assurances of pardon, that by the hope of it we might be animated to a dutiful return to him; but he had such pity on our weakness, tho' it was in a great measure criminal, and contracted by our own fault, that he sends his
Holy

* Rom. ii. 5.

Holy Spirit to help our infirmities, to enlighten our darkness, and to strengthen our feeble powers; and if after all we will remain impenitent, and defeat the best means, and gracious efforts of mercy for our recovery, our ruin must be wholly charg'd on ourselves.

And, *lastly*, the kingdom of heaven, or the gospel, has brought *life and immortality to light*, and since *we have entrance with boldness into the holiest of all by the blood of Jesus, by that new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.* The apostle's inference is very just, *Heb. x. 22. Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure waters;* that is, let us come to God in the exercise of faith and unfeigned repentance. It is true, that reason itself and natural religion carries no small light into futurity. When we consider the moral perfections of God, from which we infer that some time or other he will make a distinction between the good and the bad, which is not done in the external administration of providence here, for as *Solomon* observes, *Eccles. ix. 2.*

All

SERM. *All things come alike to all, there is one event*
 IV. *to the righteous and to the wicked, to the good,*
and to the clean, and to the unclean, to him
that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth
not; as is the good, so is the sinner, and he that
sweareth as he that feareth an oath; when,
 I say, we consider this, we conclude very
 reasonably, that there will be a great difference
 made hereafter in the condition of
 men, by the appointment of their great
 judge.

But, christianity gives us still a much
 clearer light into the other world. It represents
 a future judgment, and the awful important
 issues of it in the most affecting
 manner; that Jesus Christ, as the visible
 judge, will sit on his throne, summon the
 whole human race to appear before him,
 and distribute to every one rewards and punishments,
 according to what they have
 done in the body, whether it be good or
 evil. By this powerful consideration, God
 requires all men to repent: the hope of an
 absolute and compleat justification, and the
 enjoyment of an eternal rest, and of fulness
 of joy in God's presence, if they fulfil the
 terms of his covenant; if amending their
 evil ways and breaking off their sins, they
 patiently

patiently continue in well doing, is the SERM.
strongest inducement that can be propos'd to IV.
a reasonable nature. And, on the contrary,

the fear of that judgment and fiery indignation wherewith God will consume his adversaries, one would think sufficient to awaken the attention of the most obdurate finners, and dispose them to forsake their sins. Not that such fear is sufficient of itself to produce true repentance, but at least, it shews the extreme folly of impenitency; and as it is generally the first thing that takes hold of very corrupt and harden'd hearts, it may excite such consideration as shall end in an ingenuous conversion to God.

I shall now make some practical reflections on all that has been said, and the *first*, which I think a very important one, is, that we should take care to avoid resting in false appearances of repentance, and substituting any thing else in the room of that true repentance which the gospel does indispensably require. They are gross errors of the Papists, and of a most dangerous tendency to place the power of forgiving sins in the hands of frail and fallible men, and annex that forgiveness to fastings, confessions, penances, or any thing of a like nature. These things

SERM. things are entirely different from repentance,
 IV. and men are unhappily deceiv'd who trust in
 them. When our Saviour gave commission
 to his apostles, and establish'd their authority
 in this manner, *John xx. 23. Whose soever sins
 ye retain they are retained, and whose soever sins
 ye remit, they are remitted unto them;* it is
 contrary to the strain of the gospel, and rea-
 son itself, to imagine, that he has invested a
 succession of fallible mortals with a power of
 pardoning sins, and especially upon condi-
 tions different from those which he has irre-
 vocably fix'd by his laws. The plain mean-
 ing is, that having received the Holy Ghost
 as their guide, the apostles had commission,
 by their doctrine, to declare the perpetual
 unalterable terms upon which sinners might
 obtain the justification of life; and on the
 other hand, that kind of disobedience which
 wou'd fix them under a sentence of con-
 demnation. But, indeed the mistake of
 those protestants is as pernicious, (and in
 some respects more criminal, because it is
 gone into against better means of knowledge)
 who found their hopes of acceptance, and
 the remission of sins, on meerly external
 acts, on the public instrumental duties of
 religion, on confessions and prayers, and the
 sacraments,

sacraments, without amendment of life ; **SERM.**
this is nothing but hypocrisy, it is mocking **IV.**
God and deceiving our own souls.

Secondly, It must be extreme folly and infinitely dangerous, to delay the necessary work of repentance till the approach of death. This general persuasion is fix'd in the minds of men, that repent they must some time or other, since without it their destruction is inevitable. But through the deceitfulness of sin their hearts are so harden'd, and their affections so obstinately cleave to their vitious courses and worldly interests, they incline to put off that work, which however confessedly necessary, yet is disagreeable, to a more convenient season; and the most convenient they can pitch upon is, when they must leave this world, and the pleasures of sin can be no longer held.

A great many arguments might be insisted on, to shew the absurdity of such a conduct. Any one that considers the mutability of human affairs, the uncertainties to which they are liable, particularly the life of man ; our own observation furnishing a multitude of instances of men dying without any opportunity, or even possibility, of preparing for
H death;

SERM. death ; or having any deliberate thoughts.

IV. about the issues of it : any, I say, who
 considers this, must see that it's imprudent
 even to madness, to put our salvation on such
 a risque as the design and expectation of re-
 penting on a death-bed. And as wise pro-
 vidence, to guard against our postponing
 the work of our salvation, has placed the
 manner and circumstances of our dying
 wholly out of our view, and made them to
 us utterly uncertain, so the dispensation of
 grace and divine aids may be lost, and the
 Spirit of God grieved by their transgressions,
 will at last strive no more with sinners, who are
 become *altogether flesh*, incorrigibly corrupt,
 having by a custom of doing evil harden'd
 themselves into an utter insensibility : Does
 not experience shew, and the least reflexion
 on the nature of habits, that the longer re-
 pentance is delay'd, the more difficult it be-
 comes ? And must not every one be sensible
 how inconsistent, and indeed disingenuous it
 is, to commit sin with an intention to be af-
 terwards heartily sorry for it, if there were
 no more in repentance than sorrow for
 sin ?

But the consideration to which my present
 subject particularly directs our thoughts, is,

that

that repentance, as it has been in this discourse explained, signifying an actual Reformation of life, breaking off our sins, and bringing forth the fruits of righteousness, in the approach of death, is impracticable: I have shewn you that according to the scriptural notion of it, it consists in a thorough universal change of the heart and affections of the dispositions and manner of life; at least, newness of life is absolutely necessary according to the gospel declarations. But in the case suppos'd, what opportunity is there for all this? To be griev'd for our transgressions, to acknowledge them with shame, to change our inclinations and purposes, and declare, that if we were to live we would return to them no more, which is all the repentance dying men can exercise, is not to do what God indispensably requires as the terms of our acceptance, but to substitute something else in the place of it. Besides, if ever so great stress was to be laid on these things, the sincerity of them in dying men, is always liable to suspicion. How little can be attained of that calmness and deliberation which is necessary to them, and how natural is it to fear that in the present circumstances of distress and consternation, seem-

SERM. ingly religious dispositions are only extorted

IV. by the immediate shocking apprehensions of death, and of a future punishment? We should not indeed take upon *us* to pronounce judgment against men, who having liv'd wickedly, do in the immediate views of death exercise all the repentance which is then possible for them; no doubt it is the best they can do, and it's most reasonable to press them to it. But the scriptural declarations are not calculated for that case, and for aught I see, give very little ground of comfort. Their evident design is, to awaken sinners out of their Security, and urge them by the strongest motives, while yet there is space given to repent and to amend their doings, and that being the case of every one of us, what remains but that we apply it to ourselves, diligently *minding in our day the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes.*

SER-

SERMON V.

PETER'S *denial of his Master, practically improved.*

Matth. xxvi. 74.

Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man, and immediately the cock crew.

THESE words relate an event in its kind one of the most remarkable we meet with in scripture; an eminent christian, nay, an apostle of Christ, suddenly caught in a very heinous defection from his duty, even the denial of his Lord with cursing. From whence, if we consider it seriously with all its circumstances, many useful instructions to us will arise, which shall be the principal subject of this discourse. But, in order to proceed the more distinctly, it will be necessary, *first*, to state the fact. The Apostle *Peter*, whose character by the accounts which the gospel history gives of

H 3

him,

SERM. him, appears distinguished among the dis-

V. ciples by a warm and forward zeal in his religious profession, tho' not always duely balanc'd with knowledge and deliberation; he was the first on many occasions, to express his affectionate respect to his master, and readiness to undertake any service which should be enjoined him; he had the honour to make that excellent confession concerning our Saviour, recorded *Matt. xvi. 16.* Whereupon he was declared to be the rock, upon which the christian church is built; not exclusively, however, of the other Apostles, for the church is built *upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets*; that is, their doctrine: And to him were committed the keys of the kingdom of heaven: Not peculiarly neither, but he was the first, which is the full meaning of that promise, that opened the kingdom of God, or preach'd christianity to the Gentiles; but see how little reason there is to glory in any external privileges, and what fatal reverses in their spiritual state and affairs men are liable to, who possess the most eminent of them! *Peter*, soon after being thus honoured by his master, as we read in the same 16th of *Matt.* expressed himself so ignorantly, and incon-

inconsiderately, upon the design of our Saviour's coming, and the nature of his kingdom, as to dissuade him from undergoing the sufferings his father had appointed for him; thereby meriting to himself this severe rebuke, *get thee behind me, satan, thou art an offence to me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.* This eminent Apostle, I say, was warn'd by his lord, not only in common with the other disciples, but himself personally, of the extraordinary trial he was to meet with on the occasion of his master's entering into that most dismal scene which concluded in his death. A trial so severe, that it produced the unhappy effect of our Saviour's disciples forsaking him in his greatest extremity; which was a grievous circumstance in his sufferings; foreseen indeed by himself, and foretold long before by one of the ancient prophets, for thus is expounded *Matt. xxvi. 31. the prediction of Zech. xiii. 7. smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered.* But, as *Peter* was more earnest in his profess'd resolution of adherence to his master in all events, ver. 33. of this chapter, *tho' all men should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended;* and ver. 35, *tho' I*

SERM. *should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.*

IV. So he had a special warning of his danger, nay, he was expressly told of the great particular transgression he would fall into, with all the the most material circumstances of it. Ver. 34. *Verily I say unto thee, that this night before the cock crow, (i.e. in that watch of the night, which was commonly call'd by the Jews the cock crowing; from midnight to three in the morning, or before the finishing it, that is before three) thou shalt deny me thrice.* And accordingly he was by providence permitted, to be in this signal instance a memorable and instructive example of human weakness. We must at the same time observe, that with Christ's foresight of his frail servant's defection, there was mix'd a gracious care for his recovery, which was even intimated to him; for to the same event refer these words of our Lord, *Luke xxii. 31, 32. Simon, Simon, Satan hath sought to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have pray'd for thee, that thy faith fail not, (that thou may'st not altogether apostatize from my religion, but obtain mercy to repent, and return to thy duty :) and when thou art converted, strengthen*

strengthen thy brethren. We need only add, SERM.
V.
in stating the fact, that *Peter's* denial of his master was attended with high aggravations, not only by the premonitions given him, and his own contrary purpose declared with great vehemence, which have been already taken notice of ; but by its being often repeated, three times, in a very short space. The occasion does not seem to have been so shocking, but that the spirit of a man might have sustain'd it, if he had not been thrown into a pannie, for scarcely could one in a calm state of mind believe, that the accusation of being Christ's disciple, if it had been prov'd and even confess'd in judgment, could have expos'd him to death ; which yet he had undertaken to endure, rather than deny his Lord : and, finally, the temptation, still the farther it proceeded, grew the harder for him ; and his sin increas'd from a slight denial at the first, to a passionate abjuration of his Master ; for he denied with cursing and swearing.

From the fact thus stated, as it plainly appears in, there arise very important instructions to us, which we may profitably consider, concerning the fallibility and weakness of human nature ; concerning the danger

SERM. ger of self-confidence ; the inspection of

V. God's providence into the failures of his people, together with his fore-sight of them ; his super-intending care of them, even during the progress of their temptations, and his over-ruling the issues of them for good. First, I say, the fallibility and weakness of human nature. This is what experience abundantly testifies : all the sins of mankind, and they are more than can be numbered, are proofs of it ; nay, * *there is not a just man living upon the earth, that doth good, and sinneth not.* Not that God has made us to sin : he is not the author of moral evil ; it is not the necessary effect of the powers wherewith he has endued us ; on the contrary, he has furnish'd our nature with defences against it, and with faculties which have an opposite tendency : † *He is not tempted with evil, neither does he tempt any man.* It is a voluntary perversion and abuse of our natural faculties, and a violation of that law, which he has written upon our hearts. But he has made us frail and fallible. Indeed it does not appear, that any order of created beings were made originally impeccable. As absolute perfection of knowledge is above the capacity and condition of finite

* Eccles. vii. 20.

† James i. 13.

finite minds, there seems to be inseparable from their original frame, a possibility of mistakes which may lead them into moral defects. Besides, every indigent being must have selfish affections, which may in some circumstances be the sources of error, overballancing the benevolent dispositions in which moral perfection consists. But not to insist on this, of all orders of rational creatures, which we have any knowledge of, some have actually corrupted themselves. The angels who were made pure, and in a happy state, yet did not all continue in it: some of them kept not their first estate of innocence and integrity; but, being the first example of disobedience, fell irrecoverably by their transgression, and were expell'd from their own habitation, their native heaven, *into outer darkness, where they are reserv'd under chains to the judgment of the great day.* And the scripture shews us that the first of mankind, tho' distinguish'd by the divine bounty with many gifts and peculiar privileges, whereby they were enabled to hold their integrity, and in a happy situation, far less liable to be tempted than their posterity are, yet did not abide in the innocence,

SERMON. cence, the honour and felicity, wherein they
V. were made, but suffered themselves to be
misled by the insidious arts and false representations of a subtle and malicious enemy.

But, to confine ourselves particularly to the present condition of human nature ; no man, I think, wants to have it proved that we are all liable to failures. Where is the man, who does not, to the conviction of all that are near him, and narrowly observe his behaviour, carry the plain marks of moral infirmity about him ? and yet they see but a small part of his faults. The most useful discoveries of this kind, are those which every one might make in himself by a careful attention, having within us the candle of the Lord, our own self-conscious spirits, which search the inmost parts. We might there, in a multitude of instances, discern the rise of sin, the conceptions of lust, as St. *James* calls it, or the lower sensitive part of our nature, comprehending our appetites and passions ; its progress darkning the understanding, engrossing the attention, thereby producing an insensibility to the most important things of religion, and our true rational happiness : so that the exercise of our
rational

rational and moral powers is defeated, and we betray'd into great and grievous offences: which, perhaps, upon a review, it is matter of astonishment to us how we came to be so ungrateful, so perverse, so foolish, so thoughtless about our own true interest, and so inconsistent with our dispositions and purposes at other times, as to fall into them.

It may perhaps affect our minds still more, to consider what failings, nay heinous trespasses, have stain'd the lives of very eminent persons, in whom virtue has been carried to the highest perfection that frail humanity is capable of. To see a man, not in a single action only, but through the general tenor of his behaviour, display heroic goodness, magnanimity, fortitude, patience, beneficence, in some instances of his conduct, fall vastly beneath himself, nay, into a shameful degree of the contrary vices; this is a surprising appearance; and yet the scripture history affords a variety of such examples. Scarcely, indeed, is there recorded one illustrious character with high applause, that is not sullied with some remarkable defect in that very virtue which obtain'd the greatest encomium. The celebrated *Abraham*, who has the honour to be call'd the father of the faithful,

SERM. and the friend of God, seems not to have
 V. acted suitably to his character, when, thro'
 fear, he denied his wife, thereby exposing
 her and other innocent persons to a snare,
 both in *Egypt* and at *Gerar*, where *Abime-
 lech* reprov'd him severely, as we read in the
 20th chapter of *Genesis*. *Moses*, the meekest
 man in the whole earth, yet once spake un-
 advisedly, and his spirit was embittered, so
 that God in his displeasure depriv'd him of
 the privilege of entering into *Canaan*; and
Job, whose exemplary patience is justly ce-
 lebrated in every age, yet in the extremity of
 his long continuing trial, fell into the con-
 trary distempers of mind to a degree, which
 was reproachful, and afterward the subject of
 grievous remorse. A multitude of other
 instances there are, which the time would
 fail me to mention; but that in the text is
 very peculiar. A man so near to the holy
 Jesus, a foundation on which he built his
 Church, and to whom he committed the
 keys of his kingdom, so resolute in his ad-
 herence to him as to say, without his heart
 reproaching him for insincerity, *tho' I should
 die with thee I will not deny thee*; yet in that
 very night, after so recent a premonition,
 denies with oaths, that he so much as knew
 him.

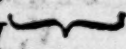
him. What is man! *wherein is he to be* SERM.
accounted of? What are even good men! V.

how little to be depended on? man in his best estate is but vanity; in his best moral state, or temper of mind in this world, but uncertain. How changeable are his purposes? they seem to be strong, and he has mighty confidence in them; in his own fond imagination nothing is too hard for him; but anon his passions rise violently agitated by temptations, presently his understanding is darkned, pious and virtuous resolutions are forgotten, and feeble as water, he yields to the first assault. If the shortness of the time, affording very little opportunity for calm reflection; the situation of the apostle surrounded with inveterate enemies, not one fellow disciple near him, nor any person who might in the least contribute to his assistance and support, and the confusion he was thrown into by his master's distress; if these circumstances do in some measure alleviate his transgression; for, certainly, the greater perturbation the mind is in, unhinging it, and stunning its powers so, that they are rendred incapable of exerting themselves regularly, the more pitiable is its condition, approaching to a distraction; and the less meditated

SERM. meditated and cool any evil purpose is,
 V. the less heinous; yet these very circumstances prove the point before us, the weakness of human nature: for they clearly shew, that man is obnoxious to such infirmities and distempers of mind as render him insufficient for acting the part which becomes him, and persevering steadily in it. Distempers which, though they be partly natural, and so far compassionate; yet do they also participate of moral evil, and communicate it to the actions proceeding from them; which therefore are far from being altogether excusable, as surely St. Peter's denial of his master was not, whatever may be said or imagin'd, in some degree to extenuate it. Let us now proceed

Secondly, To consider one faulty occasion of this good man's great offence, as it appears from the state of the fact by the gospel history, and it was *self-confidence*, which he carried so far as in express terms to contradict his Lord, when he told him so circumstantially, *before the cock crow thou shalt deny me thrice*; which one would think, might have very sensibly affected his mind, and produced at least a jealousy of himself, if it was not peremptorily to be taken as a prediction

prediction of a future fact; but the answer SERM.
was pronounced, rashly enough, in direct V.

opposition, *tho' I should die with thee, yet I* 
will not deny thee. It is not at all to be

doubted but *Peter* expressed the present real sentiments of his heart, he was far from intending to conceal a design then form'd to act a treacherous part: That was an hypocrisy which so good a man could not be capable of. But his fault was, speaking so positively, without due deliberation, without a becoming sense of his own frailty, and a just apprehension of his danger. He spoke the language of a sudden emotion, a fervor that was natural to him, and even a passion, rather than a calm, well weighed judgment, which is the true foundation of stable and lasting virtuous purposes. He did not consider coolly, as he ought to have done, the deceitfulness of sin, and the power of temptation, having never met with such a trial before: But too presumptuously trusting to the present warmth of his affection, was sanguine enough to believe it would never fail him.

I shall only observe at present, that an attention to what experience obviously teaches, will tend to illustrate the point before us. Nothing is more certain, or better known, than

SERM. that passions are the springs of hasty reso-

V. lution, and of action pursuant to it, whilst

they retain their strength : But they subside ; and then the contrary passions, in their turns prevailing, produce the quite contrary effects.

Peter himself was an example of this ; when the heat of zeal was predominant, he was ready to venture on the most hazardous attempts in defence of his master ; that very evening he drew his sword, and boldly attacked an armed company, who came to apprehend *Jesus*, which he did rashly enough too, and without waiting for orders ; but soon that warmth abated, giving place to fear ; and when this got the ascendant in his mind, he discovered a cowardice unworthy of a man, not to speak of a disciple of Christ. 'Tis thus commonly observed in the ordinary course of men's worldly affairs, and their manner of conducting themselves ; not the most eager and passionate in forming and entering into designs, are the most to be depended on for persevering ; but rather the cool and deliberate, because they having maturely considered what difficulties and disappointments may happen, are the better prepared to meet them, and the less disconcerted in the execution of

of their designs. It is still more so in the SERM.
 affairs of religion than any other. For pas- V.
 sion has, or ought to have, less share in
 counsels of that sort: Especially it ought to
 be remembred, that our religious purposes
 above all others, are immediately under the
 divine protection, and the superior aids of
 divine grace are most necessary to our hold-
 ing them steadily. He, therefore, who en-
 gages in any arduous service to God, with-
 out committing himself to his care and di-
 rection, without placing his principal con-
 fidence in the sufficiency of God's grace,
 and his power, which is *perfected in our*
weakness; he that does so, I say, goes to
 war unarmed, and exposes himself to the
 hazard of a shameful defeat. It is here,
 especially, that we ought to trust in the
 Lord *with all our might, and he that trusteth*
in his own heart altogether, is a fool, as So-
 lomon * speaks. I do not mean by this,
 that good men, satisfied from themselves,
 and rejoicing in the testimony of conscience
 concerning their sincerity, should not have
 good hope of their persevering in it to the
 end; but *first*, that the judgment of the
 mind upon its present moral state, its tem-

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per

* Prov. xxviii. 26.

SERM. per and resolutions, should be founded on

V. careful inquiry, and very attentive consideration. There's such a self-partiality, I may say, even natural to men, that wisdom requires us not to rely wholly on the first hopeful appearances of good affections and purposes : But examine diligently, and reflect calmly that we be not deceived. Secondly, the resolutions of good men, in particular circumstanced cases, that they will stand in such a trial, which they are warned of, or overcome such a temptation, are yet less to be depended on, than their purposes of persevering integrity in the main : Because the last is what we have greater encouragement to hope for from the promises of God, *who will perform his good work in them till the day of Christ, will strengthen, stablish, and settle them, and keep them by his power thro' faith unto salvation,* if he sees their dispositions and the course of their lives habitually right with him : But they have no such security against the prevalence of particular temptations. And, lastly, great modesty becomes us, with thankful acknowledgments of, and humble confidence in God's gracious interposal for our establishment. See how St. Paul expresses himself when

when he had the strongest assurance of his SERM.
 persevering even to the end of faith, *the* V.
salvation of the soul; 2. Tim. i. 12. *I know*
whom I have believed, and I am persuaded
he is able to keep that which I have committed
to him against that day: Where it is plain,
 his hope chiefly rested, not on his present
 sincerity, and the firmness of his own re-
 solutions, but on him whom he had be-
 lieved; and his persuasion of his being pre-
 served to the final happiness of the great
 day, was founded on the ability, and the
 grace of that Saviour, to whom he had
 committed his soul in well doing.

Thirdly, The whole passage, whereof my
 text is a part, leads us to consider the in-
 spection of God's providence into the fail-
 ures of his servants, his foresight of them,
 his superintending care, even during the pro-
 gress of their temptations, and his over-
 ruling the issues of them for good. No-
 thing does more obviously strike our minds
 in reading the history, than the part which
 our Saviour had in it. He foresaw *Peter's*
 denying him. What can be more evident?
 he foretold it with all its circumstances, and
 if this transgression of *Peter*, of which
 himself was the adequate, complete, and
 only

SERM. only guilty cause, was the object of divine
V. prescience, so are all others of the same kind
indeed all the voluntary actions of moral
agents: For no reason can possibly be assigned,
why some should, and not others. This is, I acknowledge,
a subject of a very high nature, and difficult questions have
been moved concerning it. As how it can consist with the
freedom of rational agents? and, again, how it consists with the
rectitude, and goodness of God, to foresee moral evil in his
creatures, and not interpose for preventing it? I shall not
enter, at this time, on the discussion of these points, but only
observe, that the liberty of our actions, so far as is necessary to
constitute their morality, is what we are conscious of; which is
the surest kind of knowledge, and excludes all doubting: That
prescience does not change, nor at all influence the nature of
things, particularly of human actions, any more than the bare
knowledge of what is past or present: And, that, tho' the nature
and manner of the divine foreknowledge is to us incomprehensible,
as the manner of God's exerting his other perfections also is,
for example, his power in creating, yet that's no argument
against the truth of the thing itself,

self, which is otherwise fully prov'd by SERM.
sufficient evidence. V.

But let us observe, that our blessed compassionate Saviour was not unmindful of his weak disciple, in that low state, to which he was to fall, and actually did fall, even by his own fault ; but regarded him with tender pity : He took early precautions against the ruinous tendency of that fall, by making timely intercession for him : *I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not* ; He gave early repeated warnings, that if the sin could not be wholly prevented, a foundation might be laid for repentance, when it should afterwards be brought into *Peter's* remembrance. Our Lord also, in the extremity of his own distress, when he stood before a most unrighteous tribunal, where he was cruelly and inhumanly used, yet did not forget his guilty servant. One of the evangelists observes, that when the cock crew, the time foreseen for *Peter's* compleating his offence, *Jesus* looked upon him ; which is taken notice of as the occasion of his going out and weeping bitterly ; or sorrowing after a godly sort, which wrought repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of. And, *lastly*, the sequel shows, that the good shepherd recover-

SERM.

V.

ed his straying sheep from the error of his way, and restored him to that favour with himself in which he stood before; far from taking the forfeiture of privileges which he had made by his crime, he receives him, upon repentance, as if he had not sinned, (as it was just now observed, he contributed by his gracious care and kind interposition, to bring him to repentance) and reinstates him in his office without abating one circumstance, one honourable distinction from the rest of his brethren, which had ever been granted to him. After our Lord's resurrection, when an angel attended at his grave to direct the disciples who should come to enquire for him, this heavenly messenger distinguishes *Peter*, in the report he makes to be communicated to the apostles; *tell*, says he, *to the women*, Mark xvi. 7. *his disciples and Peter, that he goes before them into Galilee*. And we read *John* xxi. 15. that he received again with great solemnity the charge which had been given him before, to feed the sheep and the lambs of Christ: Nay, care was taken by our Saviour, that *Peter* should rise with advantage from his fall, to greater usefulness, by an eminent zeal which naturally accompanies sincere repentance, for

con-

confirming his fellow disciples: And so his SERM.
master charges him, *when thou art converted,* V!
strengthen thy brethren.

From what has been discoursed on this subject, we may make several useful practical reflections. In the first place, let us guard against abusing it to the worst of purposes, by thinking little of sin, and of yielding to temptations wherewith we may be assaulted. Since good men, indeed the very best, while in this imperfect state, are liable, to be surprized, even into heinous transgression, that's a very good reason for our caution, lest we also be tempted and fall after the same evil example: Not at all for our thinking their offences the less criminal, and thereby being easily led into an imitation of them. On the contrary, a man's being otherwise good, and thro' the general course of his life and actions pious and virtuous, renders the single trespass, or the few he has been guilty of, the more sinful; because his obligations to the contrary are greatly increased by his goodness, by the experience he has had of the excellence and reality of religion, the power of its motives, the present advantages resulting from it, and by the repeated voluntary engagements he
has

SERM. has brought himself under. This is a way
 V. of thinking and practical reasoning, which
 scarcely can a sincere christian at any time
 be capable of; it is so wretchedly disingenuous, and, one would think, must proceed only from an habitually depraved heart, and lost to all sense of true piety. "I have
 " been thro' the general course of my conversation innocent, and made it my study
 " to please God, I may, therefore, for this
 " once, allow myself to transgress, and hope
 " he will not be greatly offended." Or, other
 " good men have acted in this manner, and
 " I may take the liberty to follow the example." Such thoughts, we may be assured, were far from St. Peter's heart, as they are far from every religious person's, in the worst state of mind we can reasonably suppose him in. And the most wilful sins they commit at any time are to be attributed, rather to the present power of temptations, and passions stupifying their minds, and in a great degree suspending the exercise of their reasoning powers, than to such deliberation, and meditated pretences for justifying themselves. Let it be observed, that the case of the text, and others like it, recorded in scripture, were single offences, not repeated;
 and

and therefore nothing can be drawn from them in the least to countenance evil habits, frequently producing wicked actions ; or affording hope to such as indulge themselves in them, which by the plainest and most express declarations of the word of God, disqualify men for his kingdom.

And still less is there any encouragement given by the history before us, and others parallel to it, from the divine foresight of men's offences, divine grace interposing to prevent their total apostacy, and providence over-ruling the issue for good ; encouragement, I say, to make light of their wilful sins, and go on in them with hope of impunity and acceptance. It is true, that our Saviour forewarn'd *Peter* of his fall, had a compassionate care of him in his weakness, took gracious methods for his recovery, and upon repentance restored him to favour, and to the privileges and exercise of his former office, perhaps with advantage both to himself and others ; and it may be God deals so by others of his servants, which wonderfully manifests his tender mercy ; but surely it is no reason, why we should repeat our transgressions, and harden ourselves in them.

This

SERM. This is the same absurdity, which St. Paul
 V. mentions, *Rom. vi. 1.* 'as what some men
 imagin'd to be chargeable on the gospel
 grace, and which he rejects with the utmost
 abhorrence. Having said, in the close of the
 preceeding chapter, that *where sin abounded,*
grace did much more abound; he adds, as a
 profane surmise which might arise in some
 impious minds, *shall we continue in sin, that*
grace may abound? and says, *God forbid.*
 Let it not be so. It's impossible such a
 thought should enter into a sincere heart, or
 that the grace of God should be so abused by
 any one who seriously considers the nature
 and design of it, which is, quite on the con-
 trary, to reform men, and to deliver them
 from the power of sin, as all the doctrines
 and Institutions of christianity plainly shew.

The conclusion is, that the instance I have
 been explaining, and all the circumstances of
 it fully proving human frailty, and the power
 and freedom of divine grace; that, I say,
 this instance is of a piece with the general
 intention of the grace that brings salvation,
 and hath appeared unto us, instructing us,
 that *denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts,*
we should live soberly, righteously and godly:
 that

that we should make it our study and principal care to eschew evil, and cleave to that which is good ; that we should be workers together with God for our establishment in virtue, and a resolved adherence to him ; to this end improving the invaluable advantages we have by the gospel.

Secondly, It becomes christians, and it is safe for them, always to have a modest sense of their own infirmity, and therefore to place their hope in the power and goodness of God for the preservation of their integrity, and their defence against temptations. St. Paul having, 1 Cor. x. given an abridgment of the history of the *Israelites* in the wilderness, of their sins, and their punishments, applies it for an admonition to christians, whose circumstances are in many respects parallel, and says, ver. 12. *Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.* Nothing is more apt to betray them into a fall, than a fond conceit of their own sufficiency, and resting securely in their own strength. A much better foundation of confidence he mentions in the following words, ver. 13. *God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able.*

'Tis

SERM. 'Tis true, men's consciousness of their own

V. *fincerity naturally inspires them with courage; the righteous is bold as a lion*: but that is principally with respect to events, not in their own power; and the foundation of it is the supremacy, the wisdom, the equity and goodness of divine providence, controuling the power of all creatures; with respect to their establishment in virtue, and support against temptations, it becomes christians, well instructed concerning their own weakness, and the sufficiency of divine grace, always to be jealous of themselves, and to trust in the Lord with all their might. And,

Lastly, Consider the exhortation of the apostle, Gal. vi. 1. Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye that are spiritual restore such a one to the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted. You see the best men are not out of danger; and though indignation against evil is a virtuous instinct planted in our nature, *charity which suffereth long, and is kind*, is as truly a virtuous principle, and the exercise of the latter is as much our duty, as the former; indeed

indeed a continuance in any sinful course pre-
cludes the judgment of charity itself, in fa-
vour of the sinner's present state; but if he
repent, we should confirm our love to him,
as if he had not offended. The best and
most upright minds are the most compassi-
onate towards others.

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SERMON VI.

OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

Rom. iv. 16.

Therefore it is of Faith, that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.

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EVERY one knows, that among profess'd christians there has been, and continues to be, a great diversity of opinions in some points of christianity, which the several abettors of them judge to be of considerable importance. This must be acknowledged a pretty strange appearance, considering that God gave his word to his people for a rule, not only of what every one should believe for himself, but of their union and joint profession. Not to enter
into

into a large discussion of this subject, which SERM.
my present design would not admit, one VI.
reason why christians have run into such a
difference of sentiments, and many of them
into mistakes, is, that they form their judgments,
not by considering the general intention and the principal aim of the scriptures,
but upon particular passages in some of the sacred books, without attending to
the connexion, and the occasion, and design upon which they were written; which certainly
is an unfair way of treating any writings whatsoever. And the errors arising
from it in this case, are not to be charged on the want of perspicuity in the scriptures,
but the want of candor, or mature consideration in those who read them.

There is no one article about which there have been greater divisions and contradictory opinions, than that of justification, or the way and the terms of sinners obtaining the forgiveness of sins and acceptance with God; which, being the profess'd design of the gospel, one would think, should be above all things clearly taught in it; and indeed so it is. But here may be directly applied, what I hinted before as the cause that some have fallen into mistakes. There arose vio-

SERM. VI. VI. lent controversies between the Jews and the Gentiles, who embrac'd the christian religion, about the necessity of observing the Mosaical law and institutions, which the former zealously contended for. To decide this debate, and to show the absurdity of the Judaizing scheme, St. Paul wrote his epistles to the *Romans* and *Galatians*, containing several passages concerning justification by grace and faith, as in opposition to the law, and to works which some entirely found their opinions upon, without considering the occasion and the scope which are the true key of them.

Now, if we carefully attend to the doctrines of our Saviour delivered in the four gospels, which, as it is reasonable to believe it should be, being given for a standard to christians in every age, is exceeding plain; if, I say, we carefully attend to it, there will be no difficulty in forming an idea of the conditions of obtaining the pardon of sin and acceptance with God, which it contains. Our blessed lord bringing a new revelation from heaven into a degenerate, ignorant, and corrupt world, it was necessary first of all, that his character should be establish'd, as a divine messenger, or the *Messias*; who, upon the credit of ancient prophecies, was expected

expected in *Judea*, where he began his mi-
nisty. For this end he worked many il-
lustrious miracles, the most proper and ef-
fectual way for engaging the attention of dis-
affected and prejudic'd men to his doctrine,
and procuring it a fair hearing. The first
condition, then, of obtaining any benefit by
the gospel, must be, what the blessed author
declares, *believing it, or believing in him.*
Next, he requires *repentance*, or that men
convinc'd of their former sins, of the evil
of them, and the miseries to which they
are thereby rendered obnoxious, should break
them off with abhorrence and indignation,
and return to a better mind and to a better
course of life, bringing forth fruits meet for
amendment. These are the true original
terms of christianity, fix'd by our Lord
Jesus Christ; who, when he came preach-
ing the gospel of the kingdom of God, said,
(that is, this was the substance of his preach-
ing,) *the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of
God is at hand; repent ye and believe the
gospel,* Mark i. 14, 15.

But, when men became his profess'd sub-
jects, embrac'd his religion, and entered
into the kingdom of God, upon these terms,
or into the christian state; the general
K 2 laws,

SERM. laws, or rules of their obedience, were declared by him in his other discourses ; particularly in his sermon on the mount, and and most clearly ascertain'd by the example of his own life : and they appear to be no other than the moral law, the eternal and invariable law of nature, abridg'd in those moral, and perpetually binding precepts, which *Moses* gave to the *Israelites*, containing that love, confidence, submission, and obedience we owe to the deity ; and the mutual offices of righteousness and charity we are bound to perform to one another. To this end the precepts of the law are vindicated from the defective and corrupt interpretations of the Jewish doctors, and a more strict purity and virtue enjoin'd by Jesus Christ, than what was practis'd, or so much as understood by them. He expressly declares to his hearers * *except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven* ; and all along, he uniformly pursues the same design throughout the whole course of his teaching ; constantly requiring of all his disciples, sincere holiness and conformity to the will of God,

* Matth. v. 20.

God, as indispensably necessary to their ob-
taining his favour, and the reward of eternal

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life. He describes the future judgment with great clearness and solemnity; and assures us, that sentences will then be pronounced according to our works: the righteous, that is, as he explains it, those who have abounded in the fruits of charity and beneficence, shall inherit the kingdom prepared for them before the foundations of the world; but the wicked shall be adjudg'd to everlasting punishment.

If this be a true account of our Saviour's doctrine in the gospels, as I think it will plainly appear to every one who reads them attentively to be, there can be no doubt concerning the terms of our acceptance with God, which he has fix'd. The conditions of our becoming the disciples of Christ are faith and repentance; to which, if we be sincere, the forgiveness of all our past sins is annexed; and the condition of our title to the final happiness Christ has promis'd to his disciples, is a persevering steadfastness in obeying the immutable moral laws of God; or in practising the virtues of sobriety, godliness, justice and mercy.

SERM. But, as I observed before, a controversy arising among christians, in the very infancy of the christian state, about the necessity of observing the Jewish law, occasion'd by the high opinion which the Jews had of their peculiar and distinguishing privileges, and the excellence and perpetuity of the Mosaic institutions; the apostle *Paul*, to whom the ministry of the uncircumcision, or preaching christianity to the Gentiles, was especially committed, enters into this debate; and to determine it rightly, so, as according to his own expression, *the truth of the gospel might continue in the church*, he wrote several of his epistles. It is very evident, that he decides against the pretences of the Jews, and strenuously asserts the sufficiency of the gospel itself, without the addition of the law, which he pronounces unprofitable; earnestly exhorting christians to stand fast in the liberty, wherewith Christ had made them free, and not suffer themselves to be again entangled in a yoke of bondage. To this purpose he expresses himself in such terms, as tend to magnify the gospel, and show the necessity and usefulness of it; and the insufficiency of the law to the great ends of religion. I shall in this discourse endeavour

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your to explain his doctrine of justification by grace, without works, and by faith, as in opposition to the law ; which two appear from the text to have a necessary connexion. *Therefore it is of faith that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham.*

In the first place, let us consider the meaning of this apostle's doctrine of justification by grace without works. That he teaches this is plain to any one who reads his epistles, *Rom. iii. 24.* having largely prov'd, that all men had sinned and were corrupt, both Jews and Gentiles ; that all had fallen short of the glory of God, and were concluded under wrath ; he says, they are justified *freely by grace, thro' the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.* And in the 11th chapter, having discoursed of the rejection of the Jews, that is, the body of the nation for their disobedience to the gospel, he says, that as formerly, in the days of *Elias*, when there was a general defection of the Israelites to idolatry, God reserved to himself seven thousand who did not bow the knee to the image of *Baal* ; so

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at that time, when the gross of the nation were ripening themselves for destruction by their obstinate unbelief and impenitency, there was a remnant, to whom the peculiar privileges of God's people were appropriated: And they are characterized by the *election of grace*, as in opposition to works: For it is said, ver. 6. *if by grace, then it is no more of works: Otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: Otherwise work is no more work.* The meaning seems to be plainly this. There are but two ways by which men can be rendered acceptable to God; either by an exact fulfilling of his law, whereby they are intitled to the reward as a debt, which was the proud claim of the Jews; or by the free gift of pardon upon sincere repentance and amendment, which is the gracious tenor of the christian covenant. Between those two, men were at that time divided in their hopes, and the methods they proposed for obtaining the favour of God; and they were utterly inconsistent: So that when some endeavoured to compound them, by joining with the faith of Christ and the obedience of the Gospel, the necessary observance of the ceremonial law, the

the apostle pronounces such an attempt al-
together vain, and declares in effect, that
we must hold to the one and reject the other. SERM. VI.

For he says, *Gal. v. 4.* according to this
scheme, *Christ is become of no effect to you :*
Whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye
are fallen from grace.

This notion of grace, so much insisted on
in the writings of *St. Paul*, is intended to
show the obligations we are under to the
mercy of God, in forgiving our sins, and ac-
cepting us : It cuts off all pretences to merit,
and excludes boasting. *Rom. iii. 27.* *Where*
is boasting then ? it is excluded. By what
law ? of works ? nay ; but by the law of
faith. But we are not to understand all
this, as if the gospel were a mere uncondi-
tionate declaration of pardon and offer of
salvation : On the contrary, it establishes
the necessary and perpetual obligation of the
moral law, and is designed to rescue men
from the dominion of sin : As the apostle
shows, *Rom. vi. 14.* *Sin shall not have do-*
minion over you : For ye are not under the
law, but under grace. At the same time,
he teaches, that it is the grossest abuse of
the gospel grace to imagine, that because
we are under it, we may take a liberty to
sin :

SERM. *sin*: For, as the Jews by circumcision were
 VI. bound to the observance of the whole law,
 which required a perfect unfinning conformity to it, as the condition of acceptance, according to the tenor of that covenant, *do this and live*; but that law, giving *the knowledge of sin*, could neither deliver men from the power, nor the punishment of it: So, by being initiated into christianity, we become bound to obedience, in the merciful sense, which the gospel indispensably requires, and accepts: That is, to sincerity, not sinless perfection. But if we sin wilfully, and obstinately, under grace, or under the christian profession; so far from being thoroughly justified, we are rendered obnoxious to inevitable condemnation: For says the apostle at the 23d ver. *the wages of sin is death*.

Secondly, let us consider the meaning of justification by faith without the law. That it is the doctrine of St. Paul cannot be doubted. It is the result of a long discourse on the general depravity of men, rendering them liable to the wrath of God; and the divine mercy in setting forth Christ to be a propitiation for sin, Rom. iii. 28. Therefore

we

we conclude that a man is justified by faith SERM.
 without deeds of the law; which doctrine VI.
 he says, at the 31st ver. of the same chapter,
 does not make void the law, but establish it
 rather. It does not derogate from the ho-
 nour and obligation of the moral immutable
 precepts, which are taken into the christian
 scheme, as essential; tho' the ceremonial
 institutions are declared unnecessary, and un-
 profitable to justification. It is almost need-
 less to mention particular passages from this
 apostle; his epistles abound with so many,
 which every reader must observe. What
 expressions can be more strong and full than
 those in Gal. ii. 15, 16. shewing that not
 only the Gentiles, but the Jews themselves,
 with all their great privileges, must obtain
 forgiveness, and the favour of God, in this
 way only? *We who are Jews by nature,*
and not sinners of the Gentiles: Knowing
that a man is justified, not by the deeds of
the law, but by the faith of Christ, even we
have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might
be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by
the works of the law: For by the works of
the law shall no flesh be justified.

To understand this we may observe, that
 christianity being a revelation from heaven,
 that

SERM. that it may have any good effect upon us,
 VI. we must believe it. And accordingly it is
 obvious that faith is what the gospel requires
 as a first and fundamental duty: That we
 should believe in God, and believe in our
 Lord Jesus Christ. Whereas by the religion
 of the Jews, especially in their latter days,
 and of those who endeavoured to blend Ju-
 daism with christianity, the great stress was
 laid on a scrupulous and exact observance of
 the ceremonial appointments: Therefore
 the gospel is called by St. *Paul the faith*, and
 the other *the law*. Thus in the first to the
Rom. and 5th ver. he declares the end of
 the apostleship which he received from
 Christ, that it was for *obedience to the faith*.
 What can the meaning of that expression
 be, but obedience to the law of Christ, or
 the gospel, which God published by him to
 the gentile world? as it is said, *Acts vi. 7.*
that a great number of the priests were obe-
dient to the faith. And in the third of the
Gal. and 2d ver. *this only would I learn of*
you, received ye the spirit by the works of the
law, or by the hearing of faith? and ver. 5
he that ministreth the spirit, and worketh
miracles among you, doth he it by the works
of the law, or by the hearing of faith?
 Where

Where it is plain that *faith* signifies the christian religion. It is to this therefore that the apostle attributes such efficacy to the justification of men. SERM. VI.

But it by no means follows, that St. *Paul's* intention is to attribute our acceptance with God to any peculiar virtue in faith, as separated from those works, and obedience, which are the genuine fruits of it. The faith, by which he says we are justified, is that which worketh by love, which produces a sincere love to God and men, with the proper expressions of it, in the practice of true piety and virtue. Besides, we find him as much as any of the sacred writers, pressing strict holiness and conformity to the will of God, and laying as great a stress upon it. The four last chapters of his epistle to the *Romans*, are wholly taken up in recommending the virtues of private and social christian life: And many exhortations of the same kind are to be met with in his epistles to the *Galatians*. Indeed, if we consider christianity as a divine law enforced with proper sanctions; and it is in this light the apostles and evangelists always set it; they represent it as the grace of God, which hath appeared unto men bringing salvation,

but

SERM. but it does not terminate wholly in their deliverance from punishment, nor is the design answered on their part by bare believing, for it teaches us, *that denying all ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly*: And this as the only foundation, upon which we can look for the *blest hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ*: No man can read the New Testament with any degree of attention, without being convinced that its principal scope is, to teach and urge men to goodness, righteousness, temperance, and patience, by the strongest motives, and particularly by the hope of acquittal in the day of judgment, and of obtaining eternal life; if, I say, we consider it in this light, there can remain no doubt but that, tho' by the works of the law, as set against faith, a man cannot be justified, yet that, the works and obedience of which faith is the great animating principle, are, in conjunction with it, the condition of our acceptance. All this is farther confirmed by the example of *Abraham*, and the method of his justification, which *St. Paul* represents as a precedent to all after ages, and argues from it. He asserts that *Abraham* was accounted righteous

righteous before God, while circumcision SERM.
was not yet instituted, nor any of the legal VI.
ceremonies. In this chapter he asks, *what*
shall we say then, that Abraham our father,
as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? for
if Abraham were justified by works, he hath
whereof to glory, but not before God: That
is, there is no such thing as his having any
thing whereof to glory before God. For
he adds, *what saith the scripture?* Abraham
believed God, and it was counted to him for
righteousness. Now, to him that worketh,
is the reward reckoned not of grace, but of
debt. But to him that worketh not, but be-
lieveth on him who justifieth the ungodly, his
faith is counted to him for righteousness.
Thus the religion of *Abraham* was sufficient;
a religion without ceremonies, which after-
wards were in so high esteem, and accounted
so necessary among the Jews; a principle of
faith, or of confidence in the goodness, and the
promise of God, producing intire resignation
to his providence, and sincere obedience to
his commandments. It was so before the
giving of the law: Why not after its abolition?
Christianity is the religion of *Abraham* re-
stor'd: A plain, unceremonious form of
divine service, animated by that faith, *which*
sees

SERM. *sees him who is invisible, is the substance of*
 VI. *things hoped for, and the evidence of things*
not seen, and worketh by love.

Farther, St. Paul argues not from the example of *Abraham* only, but from the tenor of the declarations which were made to him. The promise was given him, that he should be *the heir of the world, the father of many nations, and have a numerous seed*: Which the apostle interprets, not of his natural offspring, tho' they were as *the stars of Heaven for multitude*, for these were not all heirs of the promise in the spiritual sense: But so as to extend to all who should walk in his steps; that is, imitate his faith, and his virtue. Now the promise was made to him while he was yet uncircumcised, and therefore, as the text says, *is sure to all the seed*: Not to that only which is of the law, but to that also, which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all. And more fully at the 10th ver. *How was it (righteousness) then reckoned? When he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith, which he had being yet uncircumcised: That he might be*
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the father of all them that believe, though SERM.
they be uncircumcised ; that righteousness VI.
might be imputed to them also. From all

which it is apparent, what law it is the apostle intends to exclude from a share in our justification : It is that law, which was added because of transgression, denouncing wrath for every disobedience, and binding men over to punishment for the least failure, which therefore could not give life. And the Jews mistook its nature and design, if they expected life by it : For it was intended only as a schoolmaster, to lead them, by its severe discipline, to Christ the promised seed, who declared righteousness by faith, or upon the more favourable and gracious terms of a sincere, tho' imperfect obedience to the gospel. This, I say, is the law which the apostle excludes from a share in our justification : Not the eternal, unchangeable law of sobriety, righteousness, godliness, and charity, which christianity, or the grace that brings salvation, teaches, and in the strongest manner enforces, making our obedience to it indispensably necessary to our obtaining the reward it promises.

Thus the seeming contradiction between the apostles St. Paul and St. James is very

SERM. easily reconciled. The one, as I have already shewed, teaches, that we are justified by grace and by faith without works: The other directly asserts, that faith without works cannot justify. They both prove their seemingly contrary assertions by the example of *Abraham*. For as *St. Paul* expressly says, his *faith without works was imputed to him for righteousness*; and refers to the words of scripture, *Gen. xv. 6. Abraham believed, and it was counted to him for righteousness*. *St. James* as plainly says, *was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar?* And supports his doctrine by the same passage in *Genesis*: For, says he, and the scripture was fulfilled which saith, *Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness*. But the works which these two apostles speak of are intirely different. *St. Paul* treats of the works of the law, of circumcision, and sacrifices, and washing, and tythes: But *St. James* of judgment, mercy and faith, and the love of God; of virtue and charity out of a *pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned*. These last, as he speaks in the case of *Abraham*, *work together with faith,*
and

and by them faith is made perfect. That eminent patriarch did not obtain righteousness, and that high title of the friend of God, by his diligence and zeal in ritual observances; but by a very substantial proof of his confidence in God, and resignation to his will, which carried faith to its highest perfection. In like manner, altho' the works of the mosaic institution, or the Jewish religion, are now laid aside; and if we seek to be justified by them, we are fallen from grace; it does not follow, that the works of the christian religion, and obedience to the commands of Christ, are unnecessary likewise; for by them it is that faith is made perfect, practical christianity receives its finish'd form, and they are what the gospel indispensably requires to our salvation.

The sum is this; when the religion of nature, which essentially consists in an imitation of God's moral perfections, when this was so obscured in the degenerate state of human nature, that the end generally could not be obtained by it, that is, bringing men to the regular practice of virtue, and to the happiness they were originally design'd for; it pleased God to favour some

SERM. of mankind with a positive revelation of his

VI. will. The patriarchal form of religion was first instituted, and then the *Mosaical*, in which with a mixture of many ceremonies, suitable to the then state of things, and the genius of the people to whom it was given, there are many excellent instructions in the chief points of duty : but, afterwards this also proving insufficient, for the apostle shews, that *both Jews and Gentiles sinned, and fell short of the glory of God*, and therefore were equally concluded under wrath; it pleased God, by his Son Jesus Christ, to publish the law of faith, and declare his righteousness for the remission of sins; by which all, who submit to it, whether formerly under the Jewish dispensation, or heathenish darkness and superstition, should be alike entitled to the favour of God.

By this new constitution the former was disannulled, because of the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. But the essence of religion remains the same and unalterable, however the outward forms of it may vary. The substance of all true religion is obedience to the moral and eternal law of God; that is, to imitate him in justice, holiness, and mercy. The ceremonies which *Moses* instituted

instituted were of no significancy, farther SERM.
than as they served to promote this end, as VI.

appears by many exprefs declarations of the Old Testament itself. The Prophets often warn the Israelites not to trust in their oblations, and their ritual observances ; *for God loved mercy more than sacrifice ; and the knowledge of him, and obedience to his moral law, more than all their burnt-offerings ; that he took no pleasure in the blood of bulls and goats ; nay thousands of rams, and ten thousand rivers of oyl, could not expiate the least of their transgressions.* And the only way to please him was, *to cease to do evil, and learn to do well ; to seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, and plead for the widow : in fine, to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.* Thus the apostle teaches us to understand the true spirit of the Jewish religion, and to distinguish between a nominal Jew, who is one outwardly, and him who is sincere, and comes up to the real design of his profession. *Rom. ii. 28, 29. He is not a Jew who is one outwardly ; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh : but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not*

SERM. *in the letter, whose praise is not of men but*
 VI. *of God.* The case is the same in christia-

nity, which is perverted in the worst manner, if we take encouragement from it to sin. The apostle having fully establish'd his doctrine of grace, and said, *that it did much more abound where sin had abounded*; asks this question, *what shall we say then, Rom. vi. 1. shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?* Which inference he rejects with the utmost abhorrence. *God forbid!* and goes on to shew, that it is quite contrary to the nature and design of the christian state, whereby we are *dead to sin*, and therefore ought not to live any longer therein. Elsewhere he speaks of it as a most shocking absurdity, to make Christ *the minister of sin*; which is really the meaning of representing the gospel, as if it made void the law, or in any respect weaken'd the obligation which is upon christians to keep its precepts.

Upon the whole; one cannot imagine a greater inconsistency, than for a christian to transact with God and claim to his favour, upon the foot of external observances, or of faith, while he allows himself in any vicious course, and neglects judgment, mercy, and
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the love of God. This is to transfer Judaism, SERM.
 not the true religion taught by the Prophets to VI.
 the Israelites, but the perverse notions and
 spirit, which prevail'd among them in their
 worst and most degenerate times, into
 christianity; so much the more inexcusable,
 as the dispensation we are under, does in
 comparison with the former, bear the cha-
 racter of *spirit and truth*. Who can think
 that baptism, the Lord's supper, prayer, not
 to speak of usages meerly of human inven-
 tion, will be any more available, without
 the *new creature* and *faith working by love*,
 than circumcision, sacrifices, and the dis-
 tinction of meats and days?

It is altogether as unreasonable to expect
 acceptance by faith without works, which
 is really dead. The law of faith indeed
 excludes boasting; but not diligence in good
 works. Let us therefore give all diligence
 to make our calling and election sure, 2 Pet. i.
 10. and the way is mark'd out, ver. 5, 6,
 7, of the same chapter; and let us remem-
 ber the doctrine of the apostle John, 1 epist.
 iii. 7. *Little children let no man deceive you,
 he that doth righteousness is righteous, even as
 he is righteous.*

SERMON VII.

Of a Conscience void of Offence.

Acts xxiv. 16.

*And herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men.*SERM.
VII.

THESE words are a part of St. *Paul's* apology for himself before *Felix* the Roman governor. He was vehemently accused by the Jews as an heretick, a mover of sedition, and guilty of profaning the temple of *Jerusalem*. But, the particular crime objected to him, and which principally stir'd up their rage, was his being a ring-leader of the sect of the *Nazarenes*; so they called the christians. In his defence he expressly denies the facts charg'd upon him; such as his having mov'd sedition in *Jerusalem*, and profan'd the temple: But, for what they called heresy, he frankly acknowledged it, at the same time insisting, that it was innocent both with respect to religion

ligion and civil society. For as to religion, SERM.
he agreed with the Jews in worshipping the VII.
God of his and their fathers, and receiving
without exception what they also profess'd
to be the rule of their faith, namely, all
that is written in the law of *Moses* and the
prophets : Particularly he hoped in God,
which the Pharisees themselves, his fierce
accusers, also allowed, for a future resurrec-
tion of the dead, as that which shall com-
plete the felicity of good men. What harm
could possibly accrue to the interest and
profession of true religion, where such prin-
ciples were uniformly maintained? Especi-
ally if we add, what the apostle asserts to
have been the genuine effect of them upon
his mind, and his conversation ; *and herein*
do I exercise myself to have always a consci-
ence void of offence towards God and towards
men. This is the true test, by which our
pretended zeal for religion, and belief of its
doctrines, are to be tried and determined.
Without it zeal is but a human, indeed a
corrupt passion: And faith, or profession,
be it ever so sound, no better than infide-
lity. But, he that sincerely exercises him-
self herein, *to have always a conscience void*
of offence, in effect the same, *that feareth*
God

SERM. *God and worketh righteousness*, will be accepted with God as his approved servant; and fulfils all the purposes of religion: At the same time he ought to be acknowledged a good member of society, and is not justly obnoxious to civil government. The case being so, it is of great importance to understand, and still of greater importance to imitate the example of the apostle. In order to which I will endeavour in the following discourse, 1st, To shew what it is to have a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men; 2dly, I will consider this as the proper subject of our constant attention and exercise; 3dly, The necessity and reasonableness of it.

First, I am to shew what it is to have a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men. I suppose every one of us to know what conscience is, so far as is necessary to the present purpose. We all know that our minds, conscious of their own sentiments, affections, dispositions and voluntary actions, have a power of reflecting on themselves, and what passes in them; nay, by a multitude of occasions are unavoidably led to it. And nothing upon a review oc-

curs of greater moment, and yet more obviously, than our own moral characters, our tempers, our works; which are accompanied with the highest pleasure in our approbation, or the most painful self-reproach. It is true the principle of self-love deeply rooted in our nature, makes us always sensible to our own interests; so that a consciousness of having wisely promoted it, gives pleasure. As, on the other hand, it is galling to consider, that we have been wanting to ourselves, and imprudently taken the measures which tend to obstruct our own happiness. But, moral conscience is of a peculiar kind; and, abstracting from the natural good and evil, or pleasure and pain to ourselves, which must follow, the first and simplest reflection on our having done right or wrong, immediately gives joy or remorse. Perhaps there is not a rational being, to whom some characters and works do not appear at first sight to have an inseparable turpitude; and a consciousness of them is horridly offensive: As the opposite dispositions and works are necessarily judged amiable.

The painful sense of evil done is accompanied with fear, because of apprehended ill deserving, which the mind is immediately

SERM. diately struck with when it reflects on its
 VII. own wickedness; as, on the contrary, there
 arises an inward security and confidence from
 a consciousness of our own innocence and
 integrity. Especially the mind, which is
 firmly persuaded concerning God the su-
 preme, the infinitely wise, the perfectly
 righteous, and good governor of the world,
 must feel in the most affecting manner the
 accusations, and the acquittals of conscience,
 which pronounces its judgments with an
 eye to his superior tribunal, and with an
 expectation of their being confirm'd by him;
 as the work of the divine law is written on
 every human heart, we naturally have pre-
 saging thoughts of the account which we
 must give of our own actions, and that
*every work shall be brought into judgment,
 and every secret thing, whether it be good
 or evil.*

It is to be observed, that by the constitu-
 tion of the human mind, which compre-
 hends a variety of principles or springs of
 action, conscience is properly the superior
 controuling faculty, because the power of
 approving or condemning belongs to it.
 Every affection, every appetite, is a distinct
 and direct spring of action; but as there is

a regular oeconomy, and one common end intended in the whole frame, and an enjoyment suitable to such a being, resulting from the regular use of all its parts or exercise of all it's powers, there must for this purpose be a consistency or harmony of the whole, or the creature must be easy in itself, which it cannot possibly be, unless the self-reflecting power, or conscience be satisfied. Hence arises a proper obligation, the sovereignty of conscience ought to be acknowledged, and its dictates obey'd ; for he that hearkens to its voice, and complies with it, possesses an inward tranquillity ; he that acts in opposition to it is by the very frame of his nature uneasy and discontented in himself. Still it is to be remember'd, as was hinted before, that to minds possess'd with the serious belief and fear of the deity, this has a reference to his superior tribunal, where we cannot help expecting that the sentence of our self-reflecting power will be affirm'd ; for if we consider God as the voluntary designing author of our constitution, 'tis impossible, I think, for a reasonable attentive person to doubt but he intended we should act according to it's direction ; consequently, that our obeying the voice of conscience pleases,

SERM. pleases, the contrary displeases him. If
 VII. *our hearts condemn us*, that is, if conscience
 disapprove our dispositions and the habitual
 course of our actions, or any deliberate de-
 signed work, we have then reason to dread
 the vengeance of him *who is greater than*
our hearts and knoweth all things : * *if our*
hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence
towards God.

It follows, that to all the purposes of virtue
 and religion, to satisfy the obligations of our
 nature and to please God, which is the great
 aim of piety, the short and comprehensive
 rule of conduct is always to act according
 to conscience.

But, the question is concerning the cer-
 tainty of this rule ; will it bear us out in
 every case ? Is conscience infallible ? I answer
 it is not, nor did God intend we should
 have an infallible direction in this imper-
 fect state. We are here in an infancy
 of being, training up to a more per-
 fect condition, in the mean time liable to
 some errors in judgment, and in practice
 pursuant to them : but the direction pro-
 posed, if it be rightly understood and
 impartially

* 1 John. iii. 20, 21.

impartially follow'd, is safe and absolutely the best. In any case propos'd relating to practice, let the mind free from the importunities of appetite and the tumults of passion, both which it is the province of conscience to correct and restrain, let a man, I say, calmly put the question to himself *what is right?* and, I believe, his first thoughts will generally suggest to him the proper answer in following which he is safe. After-consideration very often gives opportunity for flesh and blood, interest and passion, to insinuate themselves, and mix in our counsels, and lead to tedious reasonings, the effect of which frequently is to mislead or perplex the mind.

There are two sources of error to which our practical judgment in matters of conscience is liable, and of which we should always be aware, and they are, self partiality, and false notions of religion. The former our experience, if we be attentive, must make us sensible of. We always make allowance for it in the case of other men, who are not supposed to be fair enough judges, in the causes wherein they are interested; and cool reflexion would satisfy us, that it is often so in our own case. There

is

SERM.

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SERM. is a remarkable example of this in the history of *David*, who, after committing the heinous crimes of adultery and murder seems to have been for a long time quite insensible of his guilt; a whole year pass'd without any discovery of his remorse or contrition of heart. But, when the prophet *Nathan* came to him, and in a parable represented to him a case of inhumanity and injustice some way parallel to his own, but far inferior; immediately, he was fir'd with indignation against the supposed offender. What strange partiality was this, to have so high resentment against the lesser transgression of another, whilst he was stupidly unconcerned about much greater guilt of his own? The applications of the parable, however, was the means of *David's* conviction and being brought to repentance. But after all, the remedy against this evil is in ourselves, and it is the proper office of conscience to extirpate it. For what is self partiality, but dishonesty of heart? And therefore it is plainly contrary to conscience, not an exception to the rule proposed, but a direct violation of it, just as any other vice is, or an unruly passion indulged. And if we will resolutely follow

follow the example of the text here in ex-SERM.
ercising ourselves to have a conscience void of VII.
offence. We must banish this unfairness of
 mind among other corrupt biasses and vicious
 affections.

False notions of religion may with much
 more reason be thought to be an exception
 to the rule of following universally the di-
 rection of conscience, because the influence
 of them in misleading men is founded, not on
 insincerity or dishonesty of heart, as in the
 other case, but upon a religious principle,
 that God is in all things to be imitated and
 obeyed. If, therefore, we have wrong
 opinions concerning the Deity, if we ima-
 gine him to be an arbitrary being, who go-
 verns the world by absolute will, without any
 regard to equity and goodness, this opinion
 tends to inspire men with the like senti-
 ments, and raise in them dispositions con-
 trary to benevolence. If we mistake the
 will of God, and imagine things please him
 which really do not please him, the effect
 will be *speaking and acting wickedly for God*,
 and from a principle of conscience. They
 must be quite strangers to the world, to the
 history of all past ages, and what continues
 to be every day done in the openest manner,

SERM. who do not know that the most prodigious
 VII. iniquity is committed, indeed the most
 { cruel barbarities acted, under a pretence of
 zeal for God, for sacred truth, and pure
 religion ; not a deceitful, lying, pretence ;
 but a real and firm perswasion. The decla-
 rations of scripture itself will not suffer us
 to doubt of this. Our Saviour tells his dis-
 ciples, *John xvi. 2. the time cometh, when,*
whosoever killeth you, shall think that he doth
God service. But, we need not insist on
 any further proof, the apostle *Paul* himself
 is a very remarkable example. Before his
 conversion to christianity, superstition had
 so far misled his judgment, that he was a
 persecutor, a blasphemer, and injurious,
 with full consent of mind and believing he
 was right : For he says in his apology before
Agrippa and Festus, Acts xxvi. 9. I verily
thought with myself, I ought to do many things
contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth ;
 and, therefore, he says, *Acts xxiii. 1. com-*
prehending the very time of his outrageous
persecuting zeal, I have lived in all good
conscience before God until this day ; mean-
 ing that he acted according to his present
 judgment ; not against it, in meer com-
 pliance

pliance with lust and passion, as some wickedly do.

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From what has been now said it appears, that nothing can be of greater importance to men than to have their minds well inform'd concerning the measures of their moral conduct, and rightly to understand the practical principles of religion. Most unhappy, surely, is the condition of that mind which is thoroughly possess'd of pernicious errors, and the more earnestly it pursues its own judgment the farther still it goes astray. But, this, at least, in points of the greatest moment, is certainly not inevitable; for then our worst errors would only be our infelicities, and our actions agreeable to them could not properly be called our sins. But, indeed, God has made the great truths concerning his being, his perfection, and particularly his moral character, so manifest, that every man must discern them who applies himself to the inquiry with unprejudiced and careful attention, which is unquestionably the duty of such creatures as we are, and for want of it our hearts will some time or other severely reproach us. The principal parts of our religion being plain inferences from the divine moral attributes,

SERM. butes, must be very open to every impartial
 VII. and considerate enquirer. And, indeed, if
 we will but look fairly into our own hearts,
 divested of prepossession in favour of received
 opinions, it will not be difficult to see what
 is good and *what the Lord requires*. The
 very first dictates of nature will scarcely ever
 mislead an honest heart; at least they will
 direct him contrary to the tendency of su-
 perstition, that is, sullen uncharitableness
 and inhumanity. It must be acknowledged
 there are some very difficult cases relating to
 the subject we are considering, and it will
 be very hard to determine, how far errors of
 judgment excuse wrong practice. We have
 no reason to believe that ever we shall be
 free from infirmities and mistakes leading us
 to some wrong actions, while we are in this
 imperfect state; and shall always have reason
 to join with the Psalmist in this prayer,
 * *cleanse me, Lord, from secret faults, who
 can understand his errors?* What merci-
 ful allowances God may make for evil
 practices, which men who have honest
 intentions in the main, fall into thro'
 superstition, which was the case of the
 apostle *Paul* before his conversion; what
 gracious allowances may be made for them,

I

I say, must be left to the most equitable SERM.
and merciful judge of the world : And what VII.
mercy they may obtain, because they act, }
as he did, *ignorantly in unbelief*. But, for
us christians, besides the voice of uncorrupted
nature which every well disposed person may
understand, the rule of our religion is so
plain, so simple, so free from superstition of
all kinds, its declarations so express for moral
piety, consisting in the love of God, con-
fidence in him, and resignation to his will ;
for this, and for righteousness, temperance
and charity, as the all of religion, and what
only God will be pleas'd with ; we shall be
of all others the most inexcusable if we fall
into the contrary errors, and suffer our con-
sciences to be offended and misled by them.

I will only add under this head, that as a
truly uniform virtuous temper and course of
action is that only which bears an exact pro-
portion to the human mind, making it fully
and constantly satisfied and contented in it-
self ; we may thus judge concerning the
different cases referr'd to : A mind, not in-
deed directly disapproving itself, but doing
what it would certainly condemn if it were
not covered with a false pretence of zeal ; I
may call it a false conscience, erring thro'

SERM. superstition ; between this and a mind free
 VII. from that bias, self-pleas'd, with all the
 good affections, benevolence to all men, as
 well as a zeal of God exerting themselves
 harmoniously ; both which are exemplified
 in the apostle *Paul* at different periods of his
 life, tho' in both he says of himself, *that*
he lived in all good conscience before God.
 The latter is full of peace ; a calm serenity
 and joy diffuses itself thro' the whole soul,
 and no disturbing passions approach its rest,
 the apostle possess'd his mind in perfect tran-
 quillity, undismay'd and unterrified in the
 midst of persecution and under the im-
 mediate expectation of death, rejoicing in
 the *testimony of his conscience that in sim-
 plicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly*
wisdom, but by the grace of God, he had his
conversation in the world. The other sort of
 religion, tho' it proceeds from a zeal to God,
 and is in some respects according to consci-
 ence, yet does not sit easy on the mind ; it
 is accompanied with perturbation, and ve-
 hement, tumultuous, and disquieting pas-
 sions. So *Paul*, tho' he said that he thought
 himself oblig'd (in conscience) to do many
 things against christianity, which is as much
 as can be said for any one in such a case, yet
 acknowledges, as *Acts xxvi. 11. that he was*
exceeding

exceeding mad against christians, compelling them to blaspheme, surely a mind distracted with furious rage is in an unnatural state, and such as cannot be the genuine effect of religious virtue. SERM. VII.

By this time, I hope, we may be able to form a notion of what it is to have a conscience void of offence; it is to have that self-reflecting power, which in every human mind, for itself, is vested with the sovereign authority of judging what is right and wrong, and, accordingly, approving or condemning its own dispositions, and actions, upon a calm, diligent, impartial consideration, and using the best means in its power for being well informed; to have it free from the imputation and self reproach, not of all moral infirmity or failing, but of every habitual course of known evil, and even every single, allowed, wilful, wickedness. It is the same thing which the apostle *John* expresses by *our heart not condemning us*, 1st *Ep.* iii. 21. And which he represents as the only solid foundation of confidence towards God; as, in fact it was the foundation of *Job's* confidence, *Job* xxvii. 5. and of *Hezekiah*, who, under the immediate apprehensions of death, thus expresses

SERM. in prayer to God, his having a conscience
 VII. void of offence, as the only support of his
 soul in that extremity, *Isaiah xxxviii. 3. remember, Lord, how I have walked before thee, in truth, and with a perfect heart, and done that which is good in thy sight.*

It is worthy of our observation, that the apostle, in this very brief summary of his religion, expressly mentions two objects towards which his conscience was without offence, namely, God and man. But they are of different consideration, and conscience has to do with them in very different ways. It acknowledges God as its sovereign Lord; its measures of right and wrong are his laws, and its judgments have a reference to his superior unerring tribunal, for, says St. Paul, *1 Cor. iv. 4. I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified, but he that judgeth me is the Lord.* Conscience owes no such respect to any man, no nor to all mankind; nay, it maintains its supremacy against them all; their joint acquitting verdict cannot discharge its accusations, and it triumphs in its self approbation if they should all concur in condemning. But, the meaning is, that there being two principal objects without ourselves, upon which our duty terminates,
 God

God and man, it should be our care, as it SERM.
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was the apostle's, not to trespass against either; or, that our consciences should not have matter of accusation for violating either the one or the other branch of our duty; that along with pious affections to God, and humble submission to his will, we should constantly fulfil the laws of righteousness, fidelity and charity to our fellow-creatures. This is absolutely necessary to true virtue and religion, in whatever light we consider it; it is only intire, not partial good affections, that will satisfy the obligations we are under by the law of our nature: It is universal obedience which the divine commandments require; *and he who offends in one point, is guilty of all.* We must be sensible that the declarations of the gospel, the *grace that brings salvation*, indeed, the very design of it, requires that we should live righteously, as well as godly.

Secondly, I propos'd to shew, that the having always a conscience void of offence towards God and man, is the proper subject of our constant and careful attention. *Herein do I exercise myself.* This is the Sum of religion, a matter of the utmost importance
to

SERM. to every man for himself; it requires there-

VII. fore the most affectionate concern and the most assiduous application. The wise author of nature has fitted the various kinds of beings he has formed for their proper ends; animals are determin'd to pursue theirs, by instincts which are planted in them; but man, who is indued with larger understanding, and a capacity of discerning the nobler design of his creation, and the true perfection of his rational nature, is left to prosecute it in the most suitable manner, that is, by the best and most vigorous exercise of all his higher powers. What can be more congruous to reason than that our happiness should depend on ourselves; and that, as we generally find it even in the low affairs of the present life, so it should be throughout, in virtue, in moral perfection, and rational enjoyment, *that the hand of the diligent maketh rich?* But, especially, as this is our state of trial and preparation for a future existence, God is pleas'd *now* to commit to us that which is in comparison *little*, according to our Saviour's parable, *Luke xvi.* and *that which is anothers*, that by an industrious improvement we may be the better fitted for *much*, and what *shall be our own* for ever. This is the principal point

point of our probation, whether we will in SERM.
 such darkness of understanding, and so VII.
 many temptations from without, and from
 our own infirmities, make religion and vir-
 tue our chief business; and labour above all
 things to maintain our integrity, or keep con-
 sciences void of offence. Every man who
 thus employs himself will find indeed, that
 his labour is not in vain; that he has suffi-
 cient encouragement to hold on his righteous
 way, and his work carries its own reward
 along with it, in the growing vigour of spi-
 rit and rational satisfaction which accompa-
 nies it; but at the same time he will find
 full employment for all the best capacities
 of his soul, and that the working out his
 salvation, and *making his calling and election*
sure, requires all diligence with the utmost
 care and circumspection.

The scripture representations of a re-
 ligious life are very instructive to this pur-
 pose, for the precepts of the gospel and the
 examples which are propos'd to our imita-
 tion, shew, that we must run and strive, and
 fight, having violent opposition to struggle
 with, and many difficulties to make our
 way through. We wrestle with *flesh* and
blood, with *flesh* which warreth against the
 spirit,

SERMON. spirit, and is the source and occasion of the

VII. most dangerous and ensnaring temptations: but it is not only flesh and blood, but *principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places.* The whole force of hell is arm'd against a conscience void of offence, and all its deepest contrivances aim at the destruction of integrity. But, farther, this is a work wherein perfection is not to be attained while we are in this world, but it is the genuine temper of every sincere person to be still making progress in it, and vigorously aiming at perfection. St. Paul gives us a very lively description of his own true character, and explains that exercise of his which is mention'd in the text, *Phil. iii. 12, &c. Not as tho' I had already attain'd, either were already perfect, but I follow after, that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of, Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.* I propos'd lastly,

To

To consider the reasonableness and ne-
cessity of our exercising ourselves therein to
have always *a conscience void of offence.*

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But, this I hope, sufficiently appears from what has been already said; indeed it is obvious to any one who will attend to it, and to deny it, is, in effect, to deny any such thing as moral obligations on the human mind. For the foundation of all virtue is the sense which every man feels in his own heart of the difference between right and wrong, or good and evil; the foundation of religion is an inward persuasion of the difference between what God requires and what he forbids us to do. To act virtuously, therefore, is to act according to that sense and approbation of our own minds; to act viciously, is to act in opposition to it. To act religiously, is to conform our practice to what we believe to be the will of God; to act irreligiously, is directly the contrary. What, then, is virtue and religion, but to have a conscience void of offence? And what is it to exercise ourselves herein, but to make virtue and religion still our study, and still endeavour to practise it, from a conviction that we are always in danger of coming short of it thro' weakness

SERM. weakness and temptation, and that we are
VII. in our present state imperfect.

The conduct of many, even christians, is quite otherwise ; they follow every appetite, every inclination they find in their nature, or propensity they have contracted by custom and habit, without regard to conscience, or without examining whether it be agreeable to it or disagreeable. And tho' it is not in their power altogether to silence that monitor within themselves, yet the severity of its rebukes is known to abate by a customary trespassing against it ; nay, it becomes numm'd and insensible, as it were, according to the apostle's expression, *seared with an hot iron*. Studied amusements, and the pleasures of sin, divert its admonitions. Besides, methods are invented whereby sinners deceive themselves, reconciling their sinful courses, obstinately persisted in, to the hope of acceptance with God ; equivalents are put in the place of religious integrity and obedience to the moral precepts of God : great diligence in fulfilling one commandment must answer for defects in another ; and, particularly, great strictness in observing some positive institutions, compensates for moral impurity, oppression, fraud, or unmercifulness.

Thus

Thus the ancient Jews, in the days of the SERM. prophets *Isaah* and *Jeremiab*, were guilty of VII.

heinous wickedness, or perverting judgment, grinding the faces of the poor, nay, their hands were full of blood, and yet they had great confidence in the temple of the Lord, and their religious respect to the new moons, sabbaths, or other solemnities. And so, in our Saviour's time, the *Pharisees* were a perverse and untoward generation, who appear'd righteous before men, but within were full of hypocrisy and iniquity; they in the mean time trusted in a negative righteousness and some external performances. * *I am not an*

extortioner, nor an adulterer, nor like this publican, was the religion of the *Pharisee* and the foundation of his hope, with the addition of mere outward observances; *I fast twice in the week, and pay tythes of all I possess*. This is not to have a conscience void of offence, but to substitute something else instead of it. In like manner, some christians deceive themselves, imagining that a zeal for the purity of their profession, diligence in attending the positive appointments of the gospel, ineffectual purposes of a future amendment, or a presumptuous reliance

on

* *Luke* xviii, 11, 12.

SERM. on the merits of *Christ*, will discharge their
VII. consciences from the guilt of secret vices,
and of appetites and passions immoderately
indulged. Let us not be deceiv'd this way,
God is not to be mocked, he has put conscience
in every one of our breasts, as the guide
of our actions, and a judge for him; if we
violate its rights, he will certainly require it,
nor is there any pretence by which we can
cover our selves from his justice; nay, conscience
itself will one day loudly complain
of its wrongs, and be the fiercest accuser before
the divine tribunal; make it therefore a
friend by repentance and good works.

SERMON VIII.

Perfect Love gives Boldness in the
Day of Judgment.

1 John iv. 17, 18.

Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment; he that feareth is not made perfect in love.

THE happiest state of mind we can SERM.
attain to in this world, is an inward VIII.
security and confidence towards

God concerning our future felicity. Since we are convinc'd that we shall die, yet have all the reason in the world to believe that death is not an utter extinction of our being, nay, the religion we profess expressly assures us, that after it we shall be perfectly bless'd, or extremely miserable, by the righteous sen-

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tence

SERM. tence of God ; since it is so, nothing can be
VIII. of greater importance than to know, if it is
to be known, what foundation we have of
hope or of boldness, as the text expresses it,
in the day of judgment. Many, however,
of mankind, even of christians, give them-
selves very little trouble about this matter ;
not that they are satisfied on any rational
grounds their condition is safe, and it shall
be well with them hereafter ; but they pass
away their time in a stupid inattention, their
thoughts are wholly employed about the bu-
siness, the cares, and enjoyments of the pre-
sent life, and for what shall come hereafter,
they set it at a great distance, and therefore
are little affected with it ; or build uncer-
tain hopes on general unexamin'd pretences,
such as that God is merciful, that Christ is
the Saviour of sinners, of them among
others, that they profess a pure and true reli-
gion, and pay a respect to its institutions,
that their sins are not very heinous, or if they
be, 'tis their purpose to repent some time be-
fore they die, and apply themselves dili-
gently to the work of their salvation. But,
how unworthy is this of reasonable crea-
tures? I may justly apply here the words of
the

the prophet *Isaiab*, * *Remember this and shew* SERM.
your selves men, call to mind, O ye transgressors; VIII.

shall we leave at such uncertainty a concern which above all others is of the greatest moment? When God has put it in our power, and afforded us the best means for making our calling and election sure, shall we give no diligence in it, but leave the business of our salvation at all adventures, even treat it with more indifference than we do the affairs of this life? Which of us that had any pretensions to a large estate in this world, would not be very careful to enquire into our title, and make it as clear as possible? And shall we be remiss in endeavouring to ascertain our claim to the inheritance *incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*, reserved in heaven for them that sincerely obey the gospel.

Be assured there is a sufficient certainty in this point to be attain'd; and we need not say, † *who shall ascend to heaven for us, or go down to the deep, that we may know it?* Some have actually possessed an establish'd tranquillity, in expectation of eternal life. St. Paul knew whom he had believed, and was persuaded he was able to keep that which by him had been committed to him against that day;

N 2

* *Isaiah* xlv. 8.

† *Rom.* x. 6, 7.

SERM. day; † that neither death, nor life, nor
 VIII. angels, nor principalities nor powers, should
 be able to separate him from the love
 of God which is in Christ Jesus. Nor is this
 the peculiar privilege of extraordinary characters,
 of men honour'd with divine inspiration, as the apostle was;
 the grounds of it are common to sincere and good minds,
 and the evidence such as every one for himself is
 best qualified to judge of his own temper, and his
 own deliberate actions. My text teaches us the true,
 the solid foundation of confidence in the prospect of the future
 judgment, which every sincere christian may arrive to,
 sufficiently supporting to the upright heart in all events,
 and stable against all confounding fears. *Herein is our love
 made perfect that we may have boldness in the day of
 judgment; because as he is, so are we in this world;
 there is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out
 fear, because fear hath torment; he that feareth is not
 made perfect in love.* In discoursing on which words,
 I will

First, Endeavour to show you what is meant by the perfection of love, or our being made perfect in it.

Secondly,

Secondly, The happy effect of this per-
fection, which is establishing our hearts
in the expectation of the future judg-
ment, giving us boldness in it, and
casting out all tormenting and disquiet-
ing fear.

SERM.
VIII.

First, To shew what is meant by the
perfection of love, or our being made per-
fect in it. We must observe that this is the
grand subject the apostle treats of from the
7th verse of the chapter to the end, as it is
indeed the great principle of all moral good-
ness, and the very sum of our duty. 'Tis
true, he insists chiefly and more largely on
what is strictly called charity, or the love
of our fellow-christians and fellow-crea-
tures ; not however as separated from the
love of God, but connected with it ; for
when we are urg'd to love one an-
other, the main argument enforcing this
duty is taken from the love which God
has manifested to us in sending his Son to be
the propitiation for our sins ; which argu-
ment can no otherwise affect, than from a
principle of gratitude or love to God, be-
cause of the great benevolence and com-
passion he has shewn to us. And in the

SERM. words immediately following the text, it is
 VIII. directly said, *we love him because he first loved us.* Then follows, as a just inference, that if we love God, we should love our brethren also. So that the love in which christians are made perfect, and their perfection in it gives them boldness in the day of judgment, is the love of God and of mankind; what our Saviour gives us as a comprehensive abridgment of all religion, all the obedience which is due to the divine laws,
 * *To love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength and mind, and to love our neighbours as ourselves.*

But what is this perfection in love which the apostle here means, such as good men are evidently supposed in the present state to attain to? I answer, it is not absolutely free from every defect, every kind and degree even of moral infirmity. As there are different orders of moral agents, they have several standards of perfection. An absolute impeccability seems only to belong to the supreme Being himself. All creatures, the highest and best of them, since their understandings are limited, are naturally capable of being misled; and being by the condition
 of

* Matth. xxii. 37, 38, 39.

of their nature dependent and indigent, they have desires centering in themselves, the tendencies of which may possibly, in some circumstances, interfere with the benevolent affections. But, as in life and intelligence, there are different degrees, nay, and kinds of vital and perceptive powers, so it is with respect to moral perfection ; there is one standard for men in this state, another for angels, or the spirits of the just made perfect ; he may be a very perfect man, who yet comes far short in moral excellence of the pure celestial spirits.

When, therefore, christians are said to be made perfect in love, which in effect is to be perfect in all religion and all virtue, 'tis to be understood of such perfection only, as men may attain in this life ; far short of that which a good mind aspires to, and actually shall be possess'd of hereafter. It consists in the habitual prevalence of pious and virtuous affections ; they rule in the heart, controuling and conquering irregular appetites and passions, and having all the inferior ones in subordination. This is what the scripture means with respect to the primary good affection of the human mind, when it requires us to love the Lord with

SERM. *all our heart and soul and mind*; it is a governing, and the greatest love, not such as is without all defect, which may be called sinful, for tho' that may be said to be our duty, else we should have no reason to condemn ourselves for defects, yet in the Old Testament where the expression is originally used, it is intended to signify no more than sincerity; for it expresses the condition of the covenant God made with men, which certainly was not impracticable, or above the reach of the present human capacity; and it is frequently attributed to particular good men who were far from being altogether faultless.

But, it is farther to be observed, that this integrity of a virtuous temper and character, has no limits set to it, no precise bounds to which it shall come, and no farther. The highest powers of our nature, and in their best state, seem to be making continual progress; there is always room for the enlargement of the understanding and increase in knowledge, 'tis probable the mind will have the pleasure of making continually farther advancement this way; and for the moral capacities, experience teaches us that they grow; if christians do not find it so, they have themselves

selves greatly to blame ; for it is a natural SERM.
 and reasonable expectation concerning them, VIII.
 that they shall become more perfect in love
 both to God and their brethren, more vigorous
 in the practice of every virtue, better esta-
 blish'd against temptations, more stedfast
 and *complete* in all the will of God. It is
 the genius, the very nature of true religion,
 that 'tis always tending to growth, just like
 the natural life to which it is frequently com-
 pared in scripture ; for as an animal, from the
 commencement of it's life, gradually ad-
 vances towards the standard of perfection
 which belongs to it's kind, so new born
 babes in Christ are by the *milk* appointed for
 their nourishment, that is the doctrine of
 the gospel, still growing in virtue ; and every
 perfect christian will find his own genuine
 temper described in the account St. Paul
 gives of himself, *Phil. iii. 12. Not as tho'*
I had already attained, either were already
perfect, but, I follow after that I may ap-
prehend that for which I am apprehended of
Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself
to have apprehended, but this one thing I do
forgetting those which are behind, and reach-
ing forth to those things which are before, I
press

SERM. *press towards the mark for the prize of the*
VIII. *high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

To understand this subject the better, it is to be remember'd, that perfection in love is really perfection in all religion and all virtue, for love is *the fulfilling of the law*. Our whole obedience to God is comprehended in love to him, as the root and principle of it. And that this is the true sense of our sacred author, will appear from what he says in the 5th chapter of this epistle and the 3d verse, *This is the love of God that we keep his commandments* : not only it is the best evidence of our love ; it is the thing itself. And in the 2d chapter and 5th verse, *Who so keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected*. Our love to God is that dutiful and affectionate respect we owe him as the moral governor of the world, which certainly, therefore, implies obedience, or doing sincerely and constantly what we know he requires. And for charity, or the love of our neighbour, St. Paul teaches us, that it directly includes all the duty we owe him, not only the offices of beneficence and mercy, but of justice, fidelity, and whatever else is required from one man to another ; for he says, *Rom. xiii. 9. For this, thou shalt*
not

not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment (directing our behaviour to our fellow-creatures of mankind) it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, *thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. But, tho' this is the substance of that wherein we must be made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, it is necessary to add, that the sacred writers sometimes speak of religious perfection in a comparative sense. They distinguish christians into children and grown men, and exhort us always to endeavour that we may advance from the one of these states to the other; the former are the sincere, but weak disciples of Christ, in whom are the true, though low beginnings of religious virtue, so feeble that, as the apostle speaks, they are like *children toss'd to and fro with every wind of temptation*; they often fail, and are always endeavouring to recover themselves; they are constantly inclin'd to do their duty, but perform it in such an imperfect manner, as scarcely to be conscious of what is called the spiritual life, or the prevalence of good dispositions. The perfect man is he in whom virtuous habits have

SERM.
VIII.

SER.M. have taken deep root, are so confirm'd as to
 VIII. be superior to all temptations, and operate
 with such ease and pleasure that the mind
 cannot but be sensible of, and rejoice in the
 testimony of conscience concerning its sin-
 cerity.

I hope it may not be amiss to mention
 some particular instances of virtue or dili-
 gence in duty, the eminent degrees whereof
 are in scripture, particularly call'd perfection;
 such as, a constant attention to ourselves, to
 our hearts, our tempers, and the principles
 of action in us, that we may fulfil our obe-
 dience to God, and be kept from offending
 him. This was the charge which the al-
 mighty, when he appeared to *Abraham*, and
 made a covenant with him, gave him, *Gen.*
xvii. 1. Walk before me, always, as under my
 inspection, always studying to obtain my
 approbation, so shalt thou be *perfect*. A
 mind habitually rais'd above the world, hav-
 ing its affections not set on things on earth,
 but things above, with a prevailing taste for
 religious exercises and entertainments; this is
 not what every christian finds in himself,
 but wherever it is found, I think it may
 well be allow'd to belong to a character of
 eminence in piety; and so does a customary
 vigilance

vigilance against all occasions and ways of SERM.
offending. St. James says, chap. iii. 2. *If* VIII.

any man offend not in words, the same is a perfect man. Again, eminency in the practice of charity, and mercy, is an important part of religious perfection, of which I shall only give you one plain proof from the words of our Saviour, *Matth. v.* When he had earnestly recommended this virtue to his disciples, as 'tis evident his institution carries it higher than any other ever did, urging them to love their enemies, to bless, to do good to, and pray for such, as curs'd, despitefully used, and persecuted them; the conclusion of that discourse is in these words, ver. 48. *Be ye therefore perfect, as your father who is in heaven is perfect*; which are thus varied in *Luke vi. 36.* as the conclusion of the same discourse, *be ye therefore merciful, as your father is merciful*; intimating, that the most extensive disinterested goodness and mercy is true moral perfection, and the best imitation of the Deity which the human nature is capable of. And *lastly*, by a persevering patience and steady adherence to the cause of truth and virtue, under all the difficulties, afflictions, and persecutions we meet with in life,

SERM. life, we are made perfect in love. This
 VIII. will appear plainly to an attentive person
 from the nature of the thing, for what
 better evidence can there be of the strength,
 and indeed the perfection, such as we can
 attain, of good principles, than an inviolable
 adherence to them, and acting upon them
 constantly under the severest trials. And
 the apostle *James* has taught us so in express
 words; * *Let patience have her perfect
 work, that ye may be perfect and intire,
 wanting nothing.* Having thus shew'd you
 wherein the perfection of love consists, or
 what is meant by our being made perfect
 in it, I proceed

Secondly, To consider the happy effect of
 this perfection, which is establishing our
 hearts in the expectation of the future judg-
 ment, as giving us boldness in it, and casting
 out all tormenting and disquieting fear. At
 our entrance on this part of the subject, it is
 necessary to observe, that as the mind of
 man rests with satisfaction in the discovery
 of truth, with different degrees of satis-
 faction, however, according as the truth dis-
 covered is apprehended to be of importance
 to itself, so there are different kinds and de-
 grees of evidence. There are self-evident
 propositions,

* James i. 4.

propositions, as they are called, from which we cannot withhold our assent as soon as they are intelligibly proposed. Again, what is strictly call'd demonstration, or plain undeniable consequences from these self-evident actions, the understanding finds itself irresistibly determin'd to acquiesce in; but then, high probability, when the case does not admit of farther proof, arising from the nature of things, from analogy, from experience, from testimony, where the arguments on one side preponderate in our judgments against all we can discern on the other, this also captivates the mind, and we can't help yielding to its force. Especially practical principles are govern'd in their operation by this kind of evidence. It is a great part of our appointed imperfection in this state, that we have not an intuitive knowledge of things, which yet very nearly concern us as the objects of our affections and our pursuits. What shall we do in this case? Shall we neglect these things, and quit our cares about them for want of sufficient certainty? No man reasons or acts so in the affairs of common life, nay, we take up with low degrees of probability. Do men altogether decline commerce because it is liable

SERM. able to some risks, and they have not an
VIII. absolute certainty of profitable returns? Will
 the husbandman forbear plowing his grounds, and sowing in the proper season, because he is not sure of a plentiful harvest? No, he does not suspend his hopes and his endeavours for want of demonstration; but being solicitous for his interest, and seeing no other way to provide for himself, he enters into action with confidence and diligence. In like manner the christian conducts himself. The case of the seed-time and the harvest, one instance I mentioned in the business of this life, is used by the sacred writers as an image of the present and the future state, as they relate to each other. Perhaps dry, uninterested, and speculative, rather, sceptical minds, may think our prospects and our boldness with respect to the day of judgment fanciful and enthusiastic; there is indeed no demonstration: But the christian who has moral perfection and the happiness resulting from it greatly at heart, and strong affections to God and goodness, finds evidence which is satisfying, which inspires him with confidence, and excites him to assiduous diligence.

This

This leads me more particularly to con-
sider, what the evidence is upon which our
boldness in the judgment rests; and it has
these two rational foundations, *first*, the
truth of the principles of natural religion
and of christianity, or an assurance that
God will fulfil the promises made to his
servants, that he will finally acquit from
condemnation, and give eternal life to all
them who have sincerely obeyed the gospel.
And *secondly*, the christian's consciousness of
his own sincerity in that obedience. The
former I shall not now insist on, for I speak to
christians, to them who believe the gospel,
and I hope the foundation need not again
be laid. The other, that is, the inward
consciousness, the subject being what passes
in the mind itself, is, in general, the great-
est certainty we can attain to. We know
our own existence, our own faculties, and
the exercise of them, by an immediate in-
stitution; and this kind of knowledge ad-
mits of no reasoning; the mind can have no
clearer views, nor greater certainty of such
points than what arises from the first atten-
tive self-reflection. 'Tis true, experience
shows us that the human mind is capable of
such disorders, whatever the cause be, as to

SERM. be confus'd, and even misled in judging of
 VIII. its own operations. A man under an indis-
 position of his thinking powers may imagine
 he sees or perceives what really he does not
 perceive ; but this does not destroy the cer-
 tainty of sense and consciousness, in which
 we must necessarily rest, being able to pro-
 ceed no farther ; and the error is corrected
 only by reviewing the matter in a calmer
 and more compos'd state.

In like manner, though the heart, through
 inattention and prejudices, may judge amiss
 concerning its own moral state, which is a
 more complet subject of reflection and self
 conscious knowledge than the mere exer-
 cise of our natural powers, yet in general is
 this evidence to a well disposed upright
 heart, calmly and deliberately examining it-
 self, clear enough, and built upon a firm
 and stable foundation, sufficient to all the
 purposes of the self-enjoyment which arises
 from integrity, and of assuring itself before
 God, and having confidence of his felicita-
 ting favour. I take this self knowledge of our
 perfection in love, which is here said to be
 the ground of boldness in the day of judg-
 ment, to be in effect the same with what
 St. Paul, 2 Tim. i. 12. expresses by his

knowing whom he believed, and his perswasion SERM. VIII.
of his ability to keep that which he committed
to him against that day. For what is be- }

lieving? What is committing the soul to Christ, which a man is conscious of as the ground of his hope? It is not a transient act, but an habitual temper of mind clearly appearing to itself upon an impartial review, in all respects, and without reserve, conformable to the gospel; sincere dispositions and good purposes uniformly carried into actual execution in a pious and universally virtuous conversation; which was another subject of the apostle's joyful consciousness completing the former, *2 Cor. i. 12. Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.* Now what is this other than the perfection of love, as it has been explained, that is of all religious virtue, or all obedience to the gospel?

We must not pass unobserved the reason which the apostle gives in the text, why our being made perfect in love gives us boldness in the day of judgment, and it is *because as he is, so are we in this world.* That is, we are like him; as like as we

SERM. can be, or as the frailty of our nature in
 VIII. this state will allow. It is said in the verse
 immediately preceding the text, *he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, for God is love*; that's the greatest intimacy of fellowship we can have with the supreme being, and the nearest resemblance to his glorious character. I took notice before, from the words of our Saviour, that to be merciful is to be perfect, as our heavenly father is; or to make the nearest approach that finite frail beings can make to the original fountain and pattern of all moral excellence. But because the divine perfection is too high for us thoroughly to comprehend, though we should always be followers of him, as dear children, it has pleased God to bring virtue nearer to the level of our capacity in the exemplary life of our Lord Jesus Christ, *who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, and who in the days of his flesh went continually about doing good*. Since, then, we profess to *abide in him, let us walk as he did*. I suppose it will not be thought any violence to the text, to comprehend in its meaning, that we have boldness in the judgment or confidence towards *Jesus Christ* himself the judge, because the *like mind* is
 in

in us which was also in him, and we imi-
tate his example of holiness and charity. SERM. VIII.

Now surely it will be acknowledged a just ground of hope towards God, that we are like him, are made *partakers of a divine nature, and conformed to the image of his son*. It will appear at first view the high dignity of our nature, that it is capable of resembling its author, and the greatest glory we can possess, to imitate his purity and goodness without any sinful defect. This is what our hopes ultimately terminate upon, as the very essence of that glory which shall be revealed in us. Now, indeed, we come far short of it; *and it * does not appear what we shall be, but when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*. Our hopes therefore must be more lively and strong, or we must have the greater boldness the liker we are to him now, or the more we are in this world as he is.

In the *last* place, the apostle farther illustrates the great advantage of perfection in love, by its casting out tormenting and disquieting fear. There is indeed a religious principle commonly in scripture called the fear of God, which is not here intended,

O 3

and

* I John iii. 2.

SERM. and the description of the text does not
VIII. at all belong to it; it is a dutiful affection to

the deity, that reverence and honour we have, and ought to have for him as our gracious heavenly father, whereby we are inclined to keep all his commandments, and with the utmost caution to avoid offending him; far from being cast out by perfect love, as inconsistent with it, it is inseparable from it. The very object of it is the divine goodness, as the prophet * *Hosea* speaks, *they shall fear the Lord and his goodness*, and it hath no torment, but diffuses serenity and joy thro' the soul. But the fear here spoken of, and which love casts out, is the servile dread of punishment, the distracting terror of divine vengeance, that fearfulness which, as the prophet *Isaiab* says, *surprizes the hypocrites*, and wherewith unreformed sinners are afraid; the language of which is, *who can dwell with devouring flames and everlasting burnings?* And tho' even this consideration is set before impenitent sinners very reasonably, if possible, to alarm them and bring them to serious thoughtfulness about their condition, yet is it not a principle of itself sufficient to produce religious virtue;

* *Hosea* iii. 5,

virtue ; and when the more ingenuous affection of love thoroughly possesses the heart, it is cast out ; not all at once, but by degrees. SERM.
VIII.

These principles, directly opposite, may, low and imperfect measures of them, meet in the same mind ; but still as the one increaseth, the other will abate. He that feareth may have some small beginnings, and weak degrees of love, but when love becomes perfect, that fear is cast out.

I shall now conclude this discourse with the following reflections.

First, by what has been said, we are led to consider the genius, and admire the excellence of the christian religion. What can recommend any institution more than that it has provided a sufficient consolation against the fear of death and judgment ? Death would not be so terrible as it generally is to mankind, if it were not for the judgment which is expected to follow ; but 'tis this which holds them in bondage, from a secret consciousness of guilt, and therefore dread of the divine displeasure. But, now the gospel has brought us comfortable tidings concerning those most important points ; death is abolished, and it has brought life

SERM. and immorality to clear light; it assures us
 VIII. indeed of judgment to come, but teaches
 us to meet it with boldness; not only in
 general there is a glorious foundation laid for
 our hope, God is propitious to sinners, and
 his favour may be obtain'd upon the graci-
 ous and practicable conditions of sincere re-
 pentance and the amendment of our ways; but
 we know how to apply this comfort to our
 own minds, and thereby fortify them against
 the terror which is otherwise natural to them.
 What can be more rational than the doctrine
 of christianity, particularly, of my text up-
 on this head? Surely it is not the worse, but
 so much the more excellent for approving
 itself to our reason. What man, attending
 deliberately to the principles of natural re-
 ligion, could place his hope towards God
 on any other bottom than the perfection of
 love to the supreme being himself, to good-
 ness, and to mankind? Or can we have a
 surer claim to acceptance with God than a
 consciousness of our conformity to his glo-
 rious moral character, and our being in the
 world, as he is.

*Secondly, let us therefore, give all dili-
 gence to make our calling and election sure,*
 to

to confirm our title to the heavenly inheritance, and increase our confidence, by cultivating all religious and good dispositions, and adding to our faith all the christian virtues ; still study to make ourselves more perfect in love, and let it abound more and more in *knowledge and in all judgment, being sincere and without offence*, filled with the fruits of righteousness. Other foundation of hope can no man lay. 'Tis true, sinners have invented others, when their hearts could not help enquiring *wherewith they should approach the Lord, and bow to the high God* ; superstition founded on wrong notions of the Deity and his moral government, has led them to come *with rams, and with oil, and the fruit of their bodies to atone for their sins* ; but the scripture has instructed us to do what is morally good, as the sure way to happiness and peace ; *to do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with our God*. Even christians themselves have been weak, or rather perverse enough to substitute something else in the room of perfect love, and a self approving mind, as the ground of their confidence. Some trust in the truth of their religious opinions, others in the regular performance of solemn instituted services ; than which

SERM.
VIII.

SERM. which nothing can be more unaccountable;

VIII. considering how fully such pretences are dis-
 approved by plain reason, and the current
 of the scripture declarations. Others abuse
 the doctrine of Christ's sacrifice, and of
 faith in his blood, by putting it in the place
 of a good conscience for giving us boldness
 in the judgment. But certainly to hope in
 Christ for obtaining the favour of God,
 while men continue in their transgressions,
 is to make him the *minister of sin*, and to
 make void the divine law, *which he came*
not to destroy but to fulfil. Consider his
 own decision of this point, *Matt. vii. 24.*
Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and
doth them, I will liken him to a wise man,
who built his house upon a Rock; and the
rain descended, and the floods came, and the
winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it
fell not, for, it was founded upon a rock.
And every one that heareth these sayings of
mine and doth them not, shall be likened unto a
foolish man who built his house upon the sand;
and the rain descended, and the floods came,
and the winds blew, and beat upon that house,
and it fell, and great was the fall of it.

S E R-

SERMON IX.

Loving CHRIST above all, the Character of his true Disciples.

Matth. x. 37.

He that loveth Father or Mother more than me, is not worthy of me. And he that loveth Son or Daughter more than me, is not worthy of me.

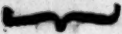
THE chapter of which my text is a SERM. part, contains the first and so- IX. lemn charge which our Saviour gave his apostles when he sent them forth to preach the gospel. As that was a very arduous undertaking, and consequences of the greatest moment depended upon it, to the service of God, and the good of mankind, it was necessary they should be well instructed how to behave themselves in it. And because they were to meet with such opposition from the ignorance and prejudices of men, as could not be conquered by the

SERM. the meer force of plain reason and persuasion, therefore were they furnished with extraordinary powers to do such miracles as might engage the most stupid to attend to their doctrine. Their master instructs them how to conduct themselves in the exercise of those powers, and in general to regulate their whole deportment with prudence and simplicity, so as they might give no offence, but with unblemish'd characters successfully pursue the great design of their mission. One article relating to this embassy was of the last moment, and it is very largely insisted on. The apostles were to suffer grievous persecution, being sent out as sheep among wolves, men of savage and barbarous tempers, inflamed with a superstitious passionate zeal, who would, without regard to their innocence, treat them with cruelty and rage.

Their Lord endeavours to fortify their minds against that event, arguing from a variety of topics for equanimity and patience under all their sufferings: Such as, that he had submitted himself to the same state, and surely then they had no reason to repine, nor to hope for an exemption from it. For "*the*
"disciple is not above his master, nor the
"servant

“servant above his Lord.” That in spite SERM.
of all opposition their cause should triumph, IX.
and themselves with it be in high reputation
and esteem, when their enemies should be
covered with shame. That they were under
the special care and protection of divine pro-
vidence, which orders all things wisely for
the best: And that there is a time coming
when a resolved adherence to the cause of
truth and pure religion shall be gloriously
rewarded, and the desertion of that cause,
through the fear of suffering persecution and
contempt from men, and the prevailing
love of this world, shall be punished as it
deserves. *Lastly*, our Saviour deduces the
patient enduring of afflictions, even when
attended with the most bitter circumstances,
such as losing the friendship and incurring
the utmost displeasure of our nearest and
dearest relations: I say, he deduces it from
the common obligations of christianity. Sup-
posing the case to be just as he states it in
the verses preceding the text, that the gos-
pel does not produce the proper and genuine
fruit to which by its own nature it tends,
which is peace and charity among men, but
that on the contrary it becomes the occasion of
hatred and quarrels, so far that a man's nearest
friends

SERM. friends are his most violent enemies : Even

IX.  this must be submitted to, and the fury of domestic adversaries borne by the followers of Christ, rather than they should relinquish the truth, and make shipwreck of a good conscience. Which, after all, amounts to no more than what is essentially imported in their religious profession, and a just consequence from the first conditions of their inlisting in his service. For what do we mean by taking upon us the christian profession, and calling ourselves the disciples of the Lord Jesus ? Certainly, that we prefer his approbation, and the favour of God upon his terms, to all considerations in this world, and are ready to part with every thing for it. Therefore, if the most esteemed friendship stand in the way, and we cannot hold it at less expence than forsaking our duty as christians, it must be abandoned :
*“ For no man can serve two masters : For
 “ either he will hate the one, and love the
 “ other ; or else he will hold to the one, and
 “ despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and
 “ Mammon *.”* One of the plainest lessons in christianity is, *“ seek first the kingdom of
 “ God, and his righteousness †.”* But this it
 self,

* Matth. vi. 24.

† Matth. vi. 33.

self, pursued through all its just consequences, SERM.
will lead us up through all the degrees of IX.
religious perfection : And to act the part
that is necessary for obtaining the crown of
martyrdom itself, there needs no more than
to apply that general rule to a particular case
fairly comprehended in it. Thus you see
what a consistency and connection there is
in the whole frame of religion. And to
rise to the greatest heights which can be at-
tained in it, no more is required than a firm
adherence to its easiest and plainest rudi-
ments, and to build regularly on the first
principles we have learned.

If it be so, we had need to see that the
foundation be well laid ; that is, that we
rightly understand the terms upon which we
enter into the christian profession, and dedi-
cate ourselves to the service of our Lord.

One essential condition is contained in the
text, that is, love to Christ above all others,
and a deliberate preference of him to our
nearest earthly friends ; and, by parity of
reason, to whatever else in this world may
come in competition with him for our
affection and esteem. None of us can be
ignorant, that this is what our Saviour indis-
pensably requires. It is yet more strongly
express'd

SERM. express'd in the xivth of St. *Luke* and the
 IX. 26th verse, but the meaning is the same as
 here. “ *If any man come to me, and hate*

“ *not his father, and mother, and wife, and*
 “ *children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and*
 “ *his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.*”

In discoursing on these words, I will *First*,
 consider, what it is to be worthy of
 Christ.

Secondly, I will shew, what is meant by
 the Love of *him*, as in comparison
 with, and opposition to the love of
 friends, and all other worldly interests;
 from which the truth of this declara-
 tion will appear, that we cannot be
 worthy of him upon other terms than
 preferring him to every thing else.

First, Let us consider what it is, to be
 worthy of Christ. And this we find is very
 well explained in the passage just now re-
 ferred to by this expression, *he cannot be*
my disciple; that is, he cannot be a sincere
 christian; he may call himself by that name:
 But whosoever doth not come up to the
 terms here required, is not a christian in
 heart

heart and in truth. This manner of speaking is very usual in the New Testament. At the 11th verse of this chapter, our Saviour orders the apostles, when they went into any city or town, first to inquire, who in it were *worthy*; that is, as far as can be judged, men of probity and candor. Sincerity is the sum of moral worth; and the whole value depends upon it, when a religious profession is the point to be estimated. The apostles, after their master, speak in the same strain. St. Paul exhorts christians to *walk worthy of God*, which he explains, "** by walking worthy of the vocation, wherewith they are called.*" That is, suitably to the hopes, the privileges, and the rules of it. God has called us to his kingdom and glory, and he has called us to holiness. To be worthy of him, therefore, and of his calling, is to fulfil the obligations of our religious character, as his professed servants and followers, and to be qualified upon his own terms for the recompence he has promised. It is never to be imagined that men could lay any previous obligation on God, or our Lord Jesus Christ. The divine mercy prevented us, when we

S E R M.
IX.

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were

* Eph. iv. 1.

SERM. were altogether unworthy, and our salva-

IX. tion by the gospel is wholly of grace. And

when we persevere in our obedience to it with all the worthiness we can attain to, for it is still imperfect, we must at last *look for the mercy of the Lord Jesus unto eternal life.*

But, when we receive *the word of his kingdom into good and honest hearts, and bring forth fruit with patience*; when we sincerely comply with the conditions of acceptance which he has established, and continue in them, then does "*our God count us worthy of his calling*, as the apostle speaks, 2 Thess. i. 11, 12. *that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in us, and we in him.*

This, I hope, will dispose us the more diligently to attend to the particular doctrine of this text, namely, the love of Christ above all, declared by himself, to be one essentially necessary qualification, without which we are not worthy of him, or his approved disciples, intitled to his acceptance, and the reward of his kingdom. I come therefore,

Secondly, To consider the love of Christ as in comparison with, and opposition to the love of friends, and all other worldly interests.

interests. The meaning of the text is, by SERM.
IX.
no means, that christians should not love their relations, father and mother, brethren and sisters; nor is that the meaning of the yet stronger expression, before mentioned, that they should "*hate father and mother, brethren and sisters, wife and children, yea and their own lives.*" Such affections have deep and firm foundation in nature and reason. The wise and good parent of mankind, intending the safety and happiness of them all, has planted an instinct in every human heart, whereby it is inclined not only to care for, and do good to itself, but to the whole kind. And considering the circumstances of our condition in this world, the indigences of an infant state, the infirmities of old age, and the opportunities of mutual help, which are afforded by cohabitation in families; it is for the common advantage of the species, that there should be nearer attachments, and that such relations as those of parents and children, brethren and sisters, should be endeared, and the benefit which may arise from them, secured by a peculiarly tender affection. As this may be justly attributed to God as its author, and his wisdom and goodness

SERM. shine in it, religion is not intended to root
 IX. it out, or in any degree to weaken the bonds
 of humanity. On the contrary, it serves
 rather greatly to confirm and strengthen
 them. God has expressly established the
 obligation of relative duties by his own po-
 sitive law, and annexed the promise of a
 great reward to the sincere and careful per-
 formance of them. In scripture, to be
 without natural affection is represented as
 one of the worst characters. To set light
 by father and mother is a most heinous
 wickedness, highly displeasing to God. And
 for a man to neglect caring and *providing*
for his own, especially those of his own house,
is to deny the faith, and be worse than an
infidel.*

But, the immediate ends of these natural
 relations are not the highest ends of our
 being. We are capable of nobler pursuits
 and higher enjoyments, than the ease and
 conveniencies of our present condition. And
 in order to these, our minds are endued
 with affections of a superior nature; the
 love of what *Solomon* calls wisdom, with its
excellent and right things, and the love of
 the supreme Being, the fountain of all good-
 ness and happiness, in whom all moral per-
 fections

* 1 Tim. v. 8.

fections are absolute, and infinite. This is SERM.
the love which ought to be the most intense, IX.

and to rule in our hearts. Reason teaches us, that our affections ought to bear a proportion to the worth of the object. It is reputed great weakness, at least, to be immoderately fond of trifles, and neglect things of the highest dignity and importance. Now, it must be acknowledged by every intelligent creature, who has any notion at all of God, that he is the most excellent, and therefore the most amiable of all Beings; for in him infinite natural and moral perfections meet. He is not only most powerful and wise, which characters our minds naturally admire; but in conjunction with these he is perfectly righteous, *a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he*: And he is *good to all, his tender mercies are over all his works*. No man then, if he would, can withhold his assent from this proposition, that God is the worthiest object of our affection, and our hearts must necessarily condemn us in preferring other things to him. And as this is what the light of nature teaches men, so the first and great commandment of God's po-

SERM. fitive law is, "** thou shalt love the Lord thy*

IX. "*God with all thy heart, and with all thy*

"soul, and with all thy mind:" That is, with sincerity, and an inward affection as the constant abiding principle of obedience; and with cheerfulness and delight, running in the way of his commandments. This ought to be the ruling principle in our minds, controuling and directing the measure and exercise of all our other affections: For the least reflection will convince us, that there being a variety of inclinations and desires in our nature, which are the springs of action, there must be a subordination; some must necessarily yield to others: And so we find in experience. It is the predominant affection which constitutes the character, and temper of a man. The covetous is he, in whom the love of wealth prevails over all other inclinations; the ambitious in whom the love of honour; the voluptuous, in whom the love of sensual pleasures. Each of these will sacrifice every other interest to his idol, and every other desire, which is even natural to him, yet not so strong. But to preserve an universal harmony in the mind of man, and to constitute a truly religious and virtuous character, the love of God,

God, and of goodness ought to be predominant. Other affections are not to be rooted out, but this must be supreme; and they gratified and indulged only by its permission, and so far, as not to be inconsistent with it. SERM. IX.

This is the true meaning of my text. For what I would principally observe for illustrating this subject, is, that the love of Christ, and the love of God and goodness, is just the same. His professed design, which he uniformly pursued in his doctrine, and through the whole course of his actions and sufferings, was to glorify his heavenly father; that is, to promote righteousness, piety and virtue in the world, which is the image and glory of God; to recover men from their corruption and degeneracy to the sincere observance of his laws, and the imitation of his holiness. It can never then be imagined, that he intended to set up himself as an object of our esteem and affection, by way of distinction from his father: As he says himself, ** he and his father are one.* It is his glory to be the *express image of the Father's person*, and to *declare him, whom no man hath seen at any time.*

P 4

* John x. 30.

SERM. time. So that *whoſoever hath, that is, knows*
 IX. *and loves the ſon, the ſame hath the father*
alſo.

It is apparent likewise that ſome of the principal motives of affection, propoſed in ſcripture, to God, and to his ſon, are the ſame. The perfections of power, wiſdom, holineſs, and goodneſs are aſcribed to both. *The works that the father doth, the ſame doth the ſon likewise. The worlds were made by him, and in him all things conſiſt. He works with the father hitherto,* in the providential care, and government of the world. If the divine attribute of perfect holineſs is the moſt worthy of our eſteem and imitation, our Lord Jeſus Chriſt is alſo holy, harmleſs, undefiled, and ſeparate from finners, and has given us a moſt complete pattern of all amiable virtue, that we ſhould follow his ſteps. If the love of God manifeſted to us, not only by the gifts of his providence, but eſpecially by the benefit of our redemption, be an argument for our gratitude to him, the ſame conſideration ſhould excite our love to Chriſt; for he *loved us, and gave himſelf for us, to redeem us from all our iniquity.*

And

And as moral excellence is the inseparable character of the Deity, so that it is absurd to pretend that we love him without loving it; that we love the holiest and best of all Beings, without loving holiness and goodness itself; the same is true concerning our Saviour, whom the scripture always represents, as therefore altogether lovely, because he is altogether holy, and most compassionate to sinners, intending their happiness by saving them from their sins. Indeed, the idea which the gospel principally intends to give us of him, is that of the image of the invisible God, the *brightness of the divine glory*, as manifesting in the most conspicuous manner the moral perfections, the essential purity, and infinite goodness of the Deity. And if we consider the humiliations, the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, which indeed contain powerful motives to love him, it is the greatest absurdity, and the highest dishonour to him, to separate these from what he intended to accomplish by them, namely the restoring and promoting true holiness and virtue among men. * *He gave himself for us, to redeem us from all our iniquities,*
and

* Titus ii. 14.

SERM. and to purify unto himself a peculiar people

IX. *zealous of good works*: He loved his church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it, with the washing of water, by the word; that he might present it unto himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish*.

Upon the whole then, it is evident that the love of Christ, or the love of God, manifestly contains in it the love of righteousness and goodness, essentially importing a disposition to practise it; and if we mean any thing else separate from, and unconnected with this, we certainly deceive ourselves. Some seem to place it in an unintelligent zeal and warmth of imagination, without considering the true character of the object; expressing itself by an intemperate heat for speculative notions and external circumstances, supposed to belong to the religion of Christ, with violence against all, who are differently minded concerning them. But, surely a rational love to any person, is founded on just apprehensions of his real character, and it shows itself by a studious imitation of him, and a constant endeavour to

* Eph. v. 25, 26, 27.

to please him in all things. If an illustrious S E R M.
character be known to us only by description ; IX.
and yet more especially, if it falls within
our own observation and acquaintance, the
admiration of it naturally inclines us, as far
as we can, to form ourselves upon the same
model. And if he is loved as a good man,
with whom we have to do in any relation,
we will undoubtedly endeavour to recom-
mend ourselves to his approbation, in our
whole behaviour. This is the love which
our Lord Jesus Christ requires of all his dis-
ciples, that they may be worthy of him,
and this affection in a higher degree than is
allowed to father, mother, brother, sister,
any other person, or any other thing in this
world.

Now, from all that has been said, the
truth of our Saviour's declaration in the
text sufficiently appears ; that without such
love to him, as has been described, greater
love than we have to father, mother, or any
thing in life, yea, than to life itself, we can-
not be worthy of him, or be his sincere
disciples. Indeed the declaration itself is
enough to satisfy us in this point. For since
Jesus Christ is the author of christianity, it
is he only who must fix the terms of it.

Every

SERM. Every man is at liberty as to his entering
 IX. into that profession: It is a voluntary act,
 and he may choose for himself, whether he
 will do it, or not. But as to the conditions,
 he is not at liberty. They are established
 by the author in the original institution un-
 alterably. But we may observe, that what-
 ever other representations are given us of
 the terms, they perfectly agree with this:
 And in whatever true light we take chris-
 tianity, it is impossible to answer the design
 of it, without coming up to what is here
 required. If it be a divine religion, intended
 to repair the moral blemishes and defects of
 human nature, and restore men to innocence
 and virtue, that they may be qualified for
 enjoying the favour of God. How can this
 be accomplished without their being brought
 to a prevailing love of innocence and virtue;
 which, as I have shown you, is loving
 Christ more than any thing else?

Again, let us consider that to be worthy
 of Christ, to be his true disciples, and ob-
 tain his acceptance, it is absolutely necessary
 that we should adhere to him inviolably,
 that we *should hold fast the profession of our
 faith without wavering, and be steadfast and
 immovable in good works: For they only who*
endure

endure to the end shall be saved, and to them SERM.
alone who remain faithful unto death, the IX.
crown of life is promised. Now, the only

possible security of this steadfastness, is love to Christ, and to religion and virtue above all. Without it; whenever the interest of any prevailing object of affection comes in competition with our duty, we shall desert it, and cleave to the more beloved idol. St. Paul tells us, 2 Tim. iv. 10. That "Demas forsook him, having loved this present world." And, indeed, according to the account which the apostle John gives us of the love of the world, * that it comprehends the "*lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life,*" or the pleasures of the external senses, riches, and honour, to it must be attributed the numerous heresies and apostacies of the primitive times; especially if we add to it, cowardice, which is an undue love of life, or loving it more than Christ and our duty.

I shall only add, that a steadfast, and universal obedience to him, is imported in our being worthy of Christ, or his sincere disciples. The very notion of a christian is one who keeps the commandments of Christ.

Without

* 1 John ii. 16.

SERM. Without that, the name is a meer insigni-

IX. ficancy; or rather, it is hypocrisy. Now
 this obedience is the genuine inseparable
 fruit of prevailing love to him; it is the test,
 to which our professed affectionate regards
 to him, are to be brought, that we may
 judge with certainty, whether they are sin-
 cere, or not. "If ye love me," says our
 Saviour himself, *John xiv. 15. keep my com-*
"mandments." And verse 21. "*He that*
"bath my commandments, and keepeth them,
"be it is that loveth me." Nor is there
 any thing else, which in reason can be sup-
 posed, to preserve us in a steddy, and uni-
 versal obedience to his laws. Other prin-
 ciples and motives may produce a temporary
 and external conformity, or rather appear-
 ance of conformity to them: But in many
 instances, and those of the greatest moment,
 their influence will fail. If the demands of
 a person, or object, more beloved than
 Christ, interfere with his precepts, the
 stronger affection will carry the mind, and
 thereby govern the practice. And the deli-
 berate offence in that one point is an essen-
 tial breach, forfeiting the christian character
 and hopes: So that the keeping of the
 whole law, that is, all the rest of it, passes

for nothing, according to St. James's account, chap. ii. 10. SERM. IX.

Thus it appears, that a superior love to Christ, loving him more than father, or mother, brethren or sisters, any worldly interest, and even life itself; that this, I say, is absolutely necessary to our being worthy of Christ, or his sincere and accepted disciples.

It remains now that we make some application of this subject: Which may be the better done, because our Saviour himself has gone before us, in applying it, to one of the highest and most difficult points, in the practice of religion, that is, to the case of suffering persecution. It must be acknowledged a very severe trial to be in a state of enmity with one's nearest relations, and for a man to have his *foes, those of his own house*, continually treating him ill, and ready to betray him, and deliver him up to the most grievous sufferings. This is the case supposed: And how shall a christian support himself in it? There is no principle that will bear him out, but a superior affection to Christ: And this, if it be strong enough, will do it effectually. It is true, the friendship of relations is very desirable;

SERM. as sufferings by their hands are peculiarly

IX. bitter. But that friendship is not to be

purchased, nor the sufferings avoided at so great an expence, as abandoning the cause

of religion: And whosoever will act that part, let him not pretend, that he loves

Christ. His practice is an irrefragable demonstration of the contrary. If the frowns

of a father, the hatred of a brother, and the danger of his life, are prevented at the

expence of an indignity to Christ, can he deny, that he loves them more than him?

Men may attribute their fainting in the time of trial, and relinquishing their duty

through fear of persecution to a pitiable weakness, while they flatter themselves,

they have still a sincere affection to the good cause they desert: But according to the

judgment of our Saviour, it must be otherwise. And we may every one be con-

vinced of it, if we deliberately attend to the reason of the case. For can there be

any sincere affection to God, to our Saviour, and to his cause of pure religion and virtue,

if it be not a prevailing affection, stronger than any other, which opposes it in the

heart? But that it is not so, by the supposition is manifest. Who can say he has a

greater regard to Christ, than to his life, SERM.
and to men, if to save it, he denies him IX.
before them ?

But, we may apply this also to other, and more ordinary purposes in the practice of religion. If the commanding love of Christ be a sufficient defence against the strongest temptations, it may well support the mind against lesser ones. And indeed tho' the greatest things in religion may be effected by the force of this principle, the least and the easiest cannot be done without it. There are other trials of integrity and virtue, besides persecution, arising from the common relations, and affairs in life : And the friendship of this world too commonly betrays men into enmity against God. Our affection to our friends and worldly interests may mislead us, by flattery, as well as terror : and their insinuating smiles may prove a snare as well as their frowns. If a christian then shall be in such an unhappy situation even in his own house, as to be solicited to sin, by his most intimate friends ; if their example, or persuasions allure him to that which is evil ; let him remember that first and most indispensable law of his religion, to love his God, and his Saviour, *more than*

SERM. "Father and mother, wife and children,
 IX. "brethren and sisters, yea and his own
 "life also."

This, in the case of temptation to idolatry, was expressly provided against by a divine declaration; and it may by parity of reason be applied to other cases. Deut. xiii. 6, 8.

"If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or
 "thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of
 "thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine
 "own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, let
 "us go, and serve other Gods — Thou shalt
 "not consent unto him, nor hearken unto
 "him."

Besides this, there are other temptations which derive their force from the same root, the love of our intimate friends; and are only defeated by the same principle, a superior affection to Christ. There is nothing more common in the world, than for mens families to be snares to them: While to make a large, or (as they pretend) a competent provision for them, they violate their consciences, and sin against God, either by direct injustice, or, at least, by such immoderate sollicitude, and incessant toil, as is inconsistent with piety, leaving no room for the exercises of it; or by such narrowness, and withholding more than is meet, as is directly
 contrary

contrary to charity. But, let us remember, SERM.
IX.
that this is to render ourselves unworthy of Christ, by loving sons or daughters, or other worldly interests more than him.

Besides, distresses befalling our friends, their deaths and misfortunes, which, considering the vicissitude of human affairs, are always to be expected, and they are to some minds, at least, among the most sensibly affecting trials in life; these are to be supported on the same principle. An inconsolable grief for them can never consist with a transcendent love to God, and our Saviour. For so long as the supreme object of affection remains unalterable, there is always a sufficient fund of consolation against all inferior losses.

Thus you see of what general use to all the purposes of a religious and happy life, this condition of discipleship, or of christianity would be, which our Saviour here requires. It would establish us in our christian profession; it would produce universal obedience to his laws, and make our *works perfect before God*: It would be a defence against all sorts of temptation, and minister comfort under the most grievous distresses in life. When we fail in any of

SERM. these articles, it is to be charged to the account of a defect here, to the want, or weakness of our love to Christ.

The conclusion, then, is, that we should endeavour always to have this principle strengthened in us, as the root, from which every religious virtue must grow up to its full maturity. I do not mean by this, a mere zeal of affection, and vehement emotion of mind without understanding; but a rational and deliberate esteem, founded on a clear apprehension of infinitely amiable moral excellency, and calmly directing to every good work, according to that admirable description the apostle gives in the 1st chapter of the epistle to the *Philippians* from the 9th verse, “*that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment: That ye may approve things that are excellent, that ye may be sincere, and without offence till the day of Christ. Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God.*” In order to this, nothing can be so effectual (indeed without it nothing can be effectual) as a serious attention to the motives of love. What else can excite a rational affection? If we compare all the objects

jects that solicit our desires, every enjoyment in life, with the amiable glories of the divine nature, and the *excellent* and *right* things of religious wisdom, they will be found lighter than vanity, unworthy of our choice. And for raising this esteem, and inflaming your grateful and pious affections to God, you have a great advantage by the gospel ministrations, which represent to you so clearly the glory of God in Christ, and the greatness of his love manifested in our redemption. Meditate on this, that your hearts may be warmed with fervent love to him, who so tenderly loved you; and that the love of Christ may constrain you, thus judging, * *"that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they who live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him, which died for them, and rose again."*

SERM.
IX.

* 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

Q 3

S E R.

SERMON X.

Of the proper Improvement of Occasions of Sorrow.

Ecclesiasties, vii. 2, 3, 4.

It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

SERM.
X.

THE main subject of this book is the vanity of all things under the sun. Though the frame of this world is very good, and so the wise creator pronounced it when it came out of his forming hand, that is, it was fashioned exactly according to his own model for the intended purposes;

purposes ; it answer'd his designing idea, SERM.
X.
and contained a glorious display of his per-

fections, particularly his goodness ; yet with respect to human happiness it is utterly insufficient : Which kind of vanity arises not from the state and nature of outward things themselves, for that is just as it should be under the direction of perfect wisdom ; but partly from the constitution of the human mind, which is plainly intended for purposes beyond this present scene, and partly from mens irregular desires and expectations, whereby being led to flatter themselves with foolish hopes of contentment, and satisfaction of mind, in the possession of some worldly good, they are plunged into perpetual disappointments and vexation of spirit. The preacher proves his doctrine by a general survey of the course of this world, which, though governed by steady counsel, is so various, and to our understanding uncertain, that no man knows what outward events may happen to him, nor what is really and in the whole for his advantage. He examines also particular things, on which men set their hearts, hoping for great happiness in them, such as riches, grandeur, knowledge, reputation for wisdom, and religious professions,

SERM. professions, with a laborious external devotion; and he shews that none of all these
 X. come up to what our nature determines us ultimately to pursue, that is solid and lasting happiness, which indeed is to be despaired of under the sun, that is, from all temporal and earthly enjoyments.

What then? shall we abandon altogether the hope of any good, at least, while we are in this world? shall we give up ourselves to an utter despondency, as *Solomon* tells us in this book, chapter ii. 20. *He caused his heart to despair of any good from his labour?* No certainly; there is a real and solid good which human nature is capable of *even now*, though but in its infancy of being; and by a due improvement of the present opportunities, it is prepared for a greater, even a complete felicity hereafter. The sum of this is to *fear God and keep his Commandments*, which our author says, is the *all of man*, the whole of his interest and of his duty; and it is not comprehended in the things under the sun, which he calls vanity. Not only so, there are some sentiments, a certain temper of mind and behaviour, even with respect to these sublunary things, which prevents inconveniencies, temptations, and inquietude

quietude from them; nay, and makes them subservient to our highest interests, the occasions of improving our minds in virtue, and fitting them for more excellent enjoyments.

Of this there is a remarkable and very comprehensive instance in the text. Whereas the generality of men, on the first face of objects and events, as they appear to sense, immediately engage their desire or aversion, and determine their pursuit; they eagerly follow after what at first seems agreeable, with profuse delight, and as eagerly flee from the contrary. Festival solemnities, and parties of pleasure where mirth is indulg'd without any restraint, have a gay inviting appearance; most people are therefore fond of them, and readily embrace every opportunity of such entertainment; but events which have a more severe and mournful aspect, such as bring death to remembrance, are studiously avoided. Now *Solomon* advises the very reverse of this; he judges it better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting; to accustom our hearts to the attentive consideration of afflicting occurrences, particularly death, than indulge them in licentious jollity; for though the latter is preferr'd at present by

weak

SERM. weak and careless minds, yet it has a dangerous tendency, and often proves bitterness in the end: But the other, in its first appearance less pleasing to the senses, is more reasonable in itself, and contributes to the necessary instruction of the understanding, and bettering the heart. I shall endeavour in the following discourse, *first*, to explain a little farther what the preacher here recommends, *Sorrow as better than laughter*, the going to the house of mourning, and having our hearts there, rather than in the house of feasting and mirth. *Secondly*, the reasons he insists on for enforcing his advice, namely, *that death is the end of all men*; therefore it is for the advantage of the living to lay it to heart, and to render the thoughts of it familiar to them, whereby they shall increase in wisdom and virtue.

First, I am to explain what the preacher here recommends, *sorrow as better than laughter*, going to the house of mourning, and having our hearts there, rather than the house of feasting and mirth. The expressions are plainly proverbial, and the design of them is not fulfill'd merely by the external actions, which are mentioned in a literal sense: What wisdom, what merit or virtue

is

is there in going to funeral solemnities, any SERM.
 more than to merry-meetings, if the temper, **X.**
 the thoughts and behaviour be the same, or
 no better? And certainly it may be so. Do
 not we see daily vast multitudes of people
 assembling on such occasions, who, if they
 would ask themselves what they came for,
 could give no other answer, than that it
 was to mix in a crowd of company, to en-
 tertain themselves with the magnificence of
 the funeral pomp, or, at best, to pay a civil
 compliment to an afflicted family, and the
 last respect to their deceased neighbour,
 without any more serious and affecting Im-
 pressions of mortality upon their minds, than
 they would have at a public rejoicing?
 What *Solomon* therefore intends, is, that we
 should make it our deliberate choice to go
 to the house of mourning, on purpose to have
 our hearts affected with the sadness of the
 occasion, and the monitory instance of mor-
 tality which is there presented to us; or ra-
 ther, that wherever our bodies are, we
 should designedly engage our attention to
 such subjects; that we should seriously me-
 ditate on the frailty and uncertainty of hu-
 man life, the impossibility of avoiding death,
 which makes a very important change in
 the

SERM. the condition of men, and other points of

X. a parallel nature and tendency, which, though not so agreeable to flesh and blood, are most worthy of the mind, and may have a salutary effect to the improving and entertaining its higher powers: For it is to be observed, the text says, *the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools in the house of mirth*; the bodily presence is of very small consideration, but the proper employment of the thoughts and affections is principally to be regarded, and the other chosen by a wise man, only with a view to promote it.

Secondly, when mournful are declared better than joyful occasions, and sorrow than mirth, the meaning is not to banish all pleasure, even of the external senses, from human life. *Solomon* in this book often takes care to prevent misconstructions of that sort; he calls upon men to rejoice in the fruit of their labour, and in their portion under the sun; not to indulge themselves in the excesses of sensual gratification, which, as he speaks, takes away the heart, darkens the understanding, and enervates the mind; but to receive with gratitude, and enjoy with cheerfulness the external gifts

gifts of liberal providence within the bounds SERM.
of innocence and virtue. Almighty God has X.
so framed the human nature, adapting its
constitution to our state of being, that we
have a variety of affections answering to the
various objects without us, which may be
in several ways necessary to our preservation,
and to such happiness as we are now capa-
ble of. We have desires towards those
things which contribute to life and health,
and there is pleasure annexed to the use of
them; we have fears, directing us to avoid
what may be hurtful or inconvenient; and
our sorrows themselves have a salutary ten-
dency to our advantage. But there is a sub-
ordination in our powers and affections;
some higher in their kinds than others, and
more important to the ends of our being;
and there is a proper regulation of their ex-
ercise, which in a great measure depends
upon ourselves, yet not without sufficient
intimation from the author of nature how
it is to be conducted. None of our affec-
tions are to be pronounced evil; they are the
contrivance and the workmanship of a wise
and good agent, and they all serve good
purposes; but experience shews that they are
capable of being abused; by being immoderately

SERMON. derately indulged, some grow to a faulty excess, so that they obtain an ascendant in the mind, forming its temper, while others are neglected, nay, industriously weakened, and the objects of them avoided, which are no less, perhaps more suitable to our condition, and useful to the main ends of life. This is the case of sorrow and mirth, the due ballance of which makes a proper constitution of temper well fitted to our present state, and an overgrowth of either is hurtful. As here we have a mixture of good (I mean natural good) and evil, we are called to grief and joy alternately, avoiding extremes of both. Excessive sorrow dissipates the vigour and composure of the mind, takes away the relish of our enjoyments, not excepting the highest and best of them, and will greatly indispose us for our duty in some of the most important instances; but the error of multitudes lies on the other side; their light and fluttering spirits have no taste for any thing but what is gay and mirthful; by habit this grows to an utter impotence of mind, and a perfect aversion to every thing which has a sad appearance, or is so much as grave and serious: Now this is no way agreeable to the state of man upon earth;

earth; for, as *Job* says, *he is of few days* SERM.
and full of trouble, nay, *he is born to it*, and X.

it is as natural to him as *for the sparks to fly upward*; and *Solomon* tells us, that *God has given to man vexation, and travel, and grief, as a part of his portion under the sun*. It is therefore necessary to reconcile our minds to a serious thoughtfulness about things, which for the present seem not to be joyous but grievous, that we may know the better how to bear our part in them, since they are the common lot of mankind, and a discipline which divine providence uses, in order to produce the *peaceable fruits of righteousness*. Particularly, though death be naturally the aversion of all living things, and seems to be a very dismal subject, we should accustom ourselves to think of it, whereby the horror and fear of it may be abated, and, which is of greater moment, we may be led to such a preparation, as shall happily prevent the greatest dangers. To enforce this upon our minds, I shall in the next place,

Consider the reasons insisted on in the text, namely, that death is the end of all men, therefore it is for the advantage of the living to lay it to heart, and to render the thoughts
of

SERM. of it familiar to them, that they may in-

X. crease in wisdom and virtue. The first rea-

son is, that death is the end of all men; why then should we put it from our thoughts? Why decline the serious consideration of it? If indeed unthoughtfulness were any security against the event itself, if declining to entertain it in our meditations, or a supine negligence about it, could prevent the fatal stroke, there would then be reason to banish the gloomy disturbing spectre, which casts a dark shadow over this world, and palls our appetite to the pleasures of life: But, alas, it is quite otherwise; death is inevitable; it will come whether we think of it or not; and it will be the more surprising and the more terrible, the less it has been considered. This now is one obvious sense of the assertion in the text; death is the end of all men; none of mankind can with any shew of reason, expect to be exempt from mortality, and indeed none profess such an expectation. The experience of all ages which have gone before us, and the instances which are daily before our eyes, shew that this is the common fate of mankind: Their condition in life has always been, and still is, very unequal with respect to

to power, honour, intellectual endowments, SERM.
 and other distinguishing priviledges, which X.
 are esteemed among them very considerable; }
 but at last death puts all upon a level, *their*
breath goeth out, they return to their earth,
and none has power over the spirit to retain
it, neither is there any discharge in that war.
 And as thus it appears in fact that all men die,
 so they who believe a governing providence,
 must attribute this event to unchangeable
 appointment. For the good pleasure of God
 mankind were created, by the same good
 pleasure they subsist upon the earth, which
 was given them to dwell in, not all at once
 (for that end it would not be sufficient) but
 in succession, and it is evidently as much the
 course and law of nature that we should die,
 as be born. This immutable decree of hea-
 ven concerning the humane race, is fully
 declared to us in scripture, where we meet
 with only two exceptions to it in the case
 of *Enoch* and *Elias*, both attributed to a di-
 vine miraculous interposition. And *St. Paul*
 reveals this mystery, that they who shall be
 alive upon the earth at Christ's second
 coming, shall not indeed die, but undergo a
 change equivalent to that, which shall be
 effected in others by death and the resur-
 rection;

SERM. rection; for *flesh and blood*, or the present
 X. animal constitution of our nature, *cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither can corruption inherit incorruption*; but for the rest of mankind we are expressly told it is appointed for them all once to die.

Secondly, death is the end of all men in this sense, that it finally and for ever terminates their state in this world, translating them into a quite different, and entirely new stage of being: It puts an end to their labours and enjoyments, to their various relations in life, and in the very day of death *their thoughts perish*, their desires, their hopes, their fears, their sorrows, their love and hatred, as *Solomon* says elsewhere in this book, their projects for good or evil to themselves or others; these shall all cease; and, which is of all the most important consideration, their state of discipline shall cease, and where death leaves them, judgment shall find them. The life of man is a curious and wonderful piece of the divine workmanship, it contains a beautiful variety of powers and affections, of business and enjoyment; there are united in it two beings of essentially different kinds, a particular system of matter, consisting of a numberless multitude

multitude of parts admirably put together, **SERM.**
and disposed with the clear evidence of a **X.**
amazing wisdom, so as to serve their several
useful purposes; and a spiritual substance,
the regent of the body, indued with powers
of a very high nature, the spring of thought
and various operation, self conscious and ca-
pable of pleasure and pain in a great variety.
Between these two, however different, there
is so intimate a relation (we know nothing
parallel to it) as to constitute one person, or
one living intelligent agent, such is their
mutual dependence, that the mind perceives
for the whole body, cares for all its mem-
bers, and directs all their motions; and,
on the other hand, the corporeal organs
convey to the mind the knowledge of ex-
ternal objects, and are the fit instruments
of its active powers. By this union the
human life is related to, and interested in,
the affairs both of the intellectual and
material world: It is capable of rational
and moral, and also of sensitive happiness;
and it is capable of the contrary sufferings.
But there is a subordination of its parts and
of their affections, exercises, pleasures and
pains; those which are purely mental, are

SERM. of a vastly higher nature and consideration

X. to the main ends of our being, than those
 of the body, and the former shall endure, when the others are quite perished. The principal design of providence in this whole constitution, is, that the soul should be put into the natural body for a time, short, when compared with the whole of its duration, under discipline, that acting a good part in this first stage, improving its own intellectual and moral powers, maintaining its superiority over the animal nature, and practising virtue, in opposition to infirmities and temptations, it might be prepared for another state, a state of perfection and happiness. What an important change then doth death make? It finishes all the advantages and disadvantages of our present condition. The light of the living is withdrawn, and we are removed *into the land of forgetfulness*. No more pleasure is conveyed by the eyes, or any other organs of sensation, no more satisfaction arises from the conveniencies and ornaments of life, from friendships, relations, or social communication with any of mankind in this world; no more opportunity of fighting, what the scripture calls *the good fight, of working out our salvation, and*
 of

of seeking glory, honour, and immortality, SERM.
 by a patient continuance in well-doing; for **X.**
 there is no labour, nor wisdom, nor device,
 nor knowledge in the grave.

It must therefore be our wisdom, and greatly for our advantage, to enter into an affecting consideration of this important subject, that we may act the part becoming us with respect to it, and make the necessary preparation for our inevitable fate. This is one reason by which *Solomon* enforces his advice, to choose going to the house of mourning, or habituating our minds to a serious and deliberate reflection on mortality, for, says he, *the living will lay it to his heart*; which expression imports something more than barely considering it. The same object, it is certain, may appear to the mind in very different lights; the understanding may enquire into it, even accurately, may examine its nature, its various properties and relations, yet with the utmost coldness and indifference; it is the affections, and a particular application to ourselves, that determine the importance of things, excite emotion, and have an influence on the temper and practice. How calmly and unconcernedly do men think and speak of objects and

SERM. events remote from themselves, such as dis-

X. tant dangers and distresses, which at the
same time they know must in the most sensible manner affect those who share in them? The most lively description cannot raise such passions, such fear and solicitous desire, prompting all the active powers to exert their utmost force, as if the case were our own. In like manner we may think of death in a very unaffecting way, and without laying it to our hearts, while it is not applied to ourselves, and considered as that which must very soon make an important change in our own state. It is surely of the last moment for the living to lay death to his heart, in the sense now mentioned, because his religious preparation, consequently his happiness in a future state, depends upon it; and it contains some of the strongest motives to the practice of our duty. But notwithstanding the difference which I have observed between thinking of death, and laying it to heart so far, that they may be separated; yet is the former a proper and a rational, though not always a certainly effectual means of producing the other. We find by experience, that things which do not strike our minds very strongly at first
view,

view, by an attentive meditation, and revolving them often in our thoughts, produce a great concern, and affect us very powerfully. This may very reasonably be, and frequently in fact is the case with respect to the present subject, which is the very reason of *Solomon's* advice, namely, that instead of estranging our minds from the thoughts of death, and banishing it as a disagreeable object which will marr our pleasures in life, we should rather designedly entertain the apprehensions of it, and industriously seek occasions of bringing it to our remembrance, on purpose to engage our affections, and work up our hearts to a serious concern and just solicitude about an awful event, on which so great consequences depend.

But the great practical objection, if I may call it so, that is, which influences the affections of men, and determines their conduct, though, if we examine it, it must appear to the understanding very insufficient, is taken from the disagreeableness of the subjects, mortality, and others which have a connection with it. To think often and deeply on death, with an application to ourselves; and, as what we must expect, is a

SERM. very melancholy entertainment; it fills the

X. mind with horror, spreads a gloom over
the face of all worldly comforts, and damps
our active powers in pursuing, as well as
our pleasure in enjoying them; therefore do
so many remove this sorrow from their
hearts, and put the evil day far off in their
imaginings, if they cannot do it in rea-
lity. It is not, however, thus, that we
reason, or that we govern ourselves in pa-
rallel cases; if a man has an important in-
terest at stake, if there be any ground to
apprehend the loss of his fortune or his
reputation, what doth he do? doth he put
it out of his thoughts because he wou'd
not give himself trouble? No, it affects
him sensibly, and his concern puts him up-
on using his best endeavours for preserving
what is in danger; or, if even that appears
inevitable, he cannot help being thought-
ful about it, meditating upon the nature and
extent of his misfortune, and enquiring with
anxiety how he may make the best of it,
and if there be any possibility of mending
his condition afterwards. As to the case
now before us, death is certain, and there-
by the loss of all our present enjoyments;
the possibility of preventing it, is a point
absolutely

absolutely to be given up : But how awful SERM.
 is the sequel ! And it is now depending, it X.
 must be either very happy, or very miserable, according to our behaviour. Now
 when we are sure of so great a change in
 our state as death makes, the irrecoverable
 loss of life, and whatever is desirable to us
 under the sun ; and there is, we know, a
 much greater interest than life at stake, and
 and a more lasting condition of happiness or
 misery, than any in this world abiding us,
 according as our deeds done in the body are
 good or evil, shall we decline thinking on
 this change, and securely run this hazard,
 rather than give any interruption to our
 short lived pleasures by the present uneasiness
 which must attend a serious consideration ?

But *Solomon* carries the argument yet farther ; he doth not content himself with
 urging the certainty of death, and the necessity
 which is laid upon the living to lay
 it to heart, as a counterballance to the sorrow
 which will accompany their thoughtfulness
 about it ; he goes farther, I say, and
 asserts that this sorrow itself is salutary, and
 even eligible, on the account of its tendency
 to the improvement of the mind, in wisdom

SERM. dom and virtue, which is the *Third* reason

X. enforcing the advice in the text. *The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, and by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.* It is still to be remembred, that he doth not mean to recommend sorrow merely for its own sake; every one knows that it is a painful passion, though at the same time we know too that nature determines us strongly to it upon some occasions, so that the mind even chooses it, and takes a kind of pleasure in afflicting itself: But so far as reason has any share in regulating our passions, it is becoming us to consider the end of them, and by a regard to that, to govern ourselves in entertaining, or opposing them. It is farther to be observed, that as all our passions are liable to excesses, so is this in a remarkable manner. Grief is sometimes extreme, when the occasion is ever so just; when the mind is overwhelmed and enfeebled by it, and so rendered incapable of vigorously pursuing the proper remedy, which is the very design of the grief itself. *St. Paul, 2 Cor. ii. 7.* was apprehensive of this danger to the penitent offender, whose grief was very just under the censure which he suffered for his scandalous offence,
and

and therefore he advises the *Corinthians* to SERM.
forgive him, and confirm their love to him, X.

left, says he, *such a one should be swallowed up of overmuch sorrow.* But, the true reason why the sorrow duly limited, or rather the serious temper of mind, which accompanies calm and deliberate thoughts of mortality is in itself eligible, and actually chosen by wise men, rather than a thoughtless levity of mind, and an uninterrupted merriment in sensual enjoyment, the reason, I say, is, because it is a good means of making the heart better: Better in a moral sense, that is, more virtuous and religious. It is acknowledged by us all, that there is a reality in religious virtue, and that it is absolutely necessary; but the people of a gay turn of mind will think and say, "we hope innocent mirth is not inconsistent with it," which indeed is true; but let them consider that the mirth which excludes serious thoughtfulness concerning religion and the future state, or indisposes them for it, is not innocent, though it should be free from what is in it's own nature vicious.

More particularly, the advantages of what I have shown to be the meaning of sorrow in the text, are, *first*, that it naturally leads

us

SERM. us to an attentive meditation on God, and
 X. providence, and a future state. When one,
 sedately, and with a solemn composure of
 mind, sets death before himself as the end
 of all men, and his own end, he cannot
 avoid looking up to the supreme directing
 cause of this event which is the great,
 wise, just, and good governor of the
 world, who having placed man upon earth
 for an appointed time, turns him again to
 destruction, and says, *return ye children of*
men, leave this stage to account for the se-
 veral parts you have acted in it. Now,
 these sentiments entering deeply into the
 mind, every one sees, are productive of
 true piety, of reverence for the supreme
 Being, the irresistible ruler of all things, fear
 of offending him, confidence in his mercy
 as our only refuge, obedience to his laws,
 and submission to his will. From the same
 fountain will proceed a dispassionate indif-
 ference to the things of this world, both what
 is called good and evil in it, or prosperity
 and adversity, since they are so transitory,
 and the effect of them is confined to the
 present state, they do not reach to the grave,
 where, as *Job* says, *the weary are at rest*: And
 on the other hand, all the counsels and pro-
 jects of men for their worldly happiness
 cease

cease for ever, for, *their purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of their hearts,* Job xvii. 11. and, verse 16, *their desires and hopes of that kind go down to the bars of the pit,* where men however distinguished in life, rest together in the dust; in other words, this affecting consideration produces temperance, humility, and patience, virtues of great importance to a religious life, and the only solid foundation of true inward peace and serenity of mind.

I shall conclude with the following reflections. *First*, the great and ruling design which we should constantly pursue, and take our measures according to its direction, is the bettering of our hearts, or, the improving ourselves in wisdom and virtue. That our scheme of life may be consistent, and becoming such creatures as we are, it is necessary that some principal end should be always aimed at, and all our deliberations terminate in it. Now, what can be more worthy of our character as intelligent and moral agents, what more suitable to our profession, than this I have proposed? To abandon ourselves wholly to the pursuit of present pleasures, without any further view, is not to act either as men or christians; but to make it our chief study, and
the

SERM. the main intention which shall govern our

X. counsels, and our course of action, that we may grow wiser and more virtuous, this is what our own minds will approve, and we profess to believe that the happy effects of it will abide with us for ever. And where is the man that must not acknowledge he needs to have his heart made better, that he is not yet perfect, neither has already attained that practical knowledge, and those measures of piety and goodness which he ought, and may arrive to?

Secondly, in order to so great and valuable a design, let us with firm resolution lay a necessary restraint on our senses and imagination, the most unfit counsellors in such an affair. Let us learn to deny their most importunate cravings, to retrench their pleasures, to silence their tumults, and reconcile ourselves to what may appear to them severe, particularly to inure our minds to the thoughts of death, and have our hearts often in the house of mourning.

SER-

SERMON XI.

The Happiness of the Righteous in
all Circumstances illustrated.

Isaiah iii. 10.

*Say ye to the Righteous, that it shall be well
with him.*

SCARCELY can one imagine a more SERMON.
calamitous and dismal state of things XI.
in any nation or city, than the pro-
phet here describes, as actually the condi-
tion of *Judah and Jerusalem*, a state of ex-
treme poverty, and even famine; the *stay*
of bread and the *stay of water* was taken
away; the foundations of civil government
were destroyed, and their defences against
dangers, either from abroad, or from within,
the defences both of wisdom and strength,
utterly ceased, as well as those arts and im-
provements which adorn human life, and
are the beauty and strength of society.

There

SERM. There was no more to be found among the
XI. *Jews, the mighty man, and the man of war, the judge and the prophet, the prudent and the ancient, the captain of fifty, and the honourable man, the counsellor, the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator.* What could be expected but immediate ruin to such a country? And the prophet attributes it to the just providence of God punishing that degenerate people for their iniquities; for, says he, verse 8, 9, *Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen, because their tongue and their doings are against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of his glory; the shew of their countenance doth witness against them, and they declare their sin as Sodom.* But notwithstanding all this evil, and indeed whatever confusion may happen at any time in the world, whatever distress may come upon particular men, or any number of them, the case of mankind is not absolutely and universally unhappy: It shall be well with some, and the difference of mens conditions principally depends on their moral characters. As this is clearly insinuated in what I already observed from the prophet's account of the misery of the *Jews*, and the ruin of their nation by their crimes, it is expressly and very

very solemnly declared in the text, *say ye to* **SERM.**
the righteous it shall be well with him: Do **XI.**

not imagine that I mean to pronounce one event to you all, or to put good and bad upon a level; the wise and righteous ruler of the universe will distinguish men, and all other moral agents by their dispositions and behaviour, and will render to them according to their works.

This certainly is a doctrine of the greatest importance; the very being of religion depends upon it: Unless we are persuaded, that virtue is good, and vice ill for us, what can induce our minds to choose the one and refuse the other? And as it is of the utmost importance, so no principle is more evident: It has been the support of anxious disturbed minds in all the changes of their state, even in the deepest affliction; though some good men have had difficulty enough to keep themselves always in the affectionate belief of it. In such a case as that which the text refers to, it was very necessary that it should be earnestly and warmly inculcated, that the righteous, by its influence, might maintain their integrity, and not turn away from their righteousness, either through evil example, or the temptations which

SERM. might accompany public, almost universal,

XI. calamities. But at all times it is most worthy of our serious attention, as eminently useful to engage our inviolable adherence to the cause of virtue, and that we may escape the corruption that is in the world. I shall therefore in the following discourse, *first*, endeavour to explain this subject, by shewing you who are the righteous, and in what sense it shall be well with them, or, they shall be happy. *Secondly*, I will consider upon what evidence the prophet's assertion rests, or how it appears that there is a connection between righteousness and felicity.

First, I am to explain this subject, by shewing you who are the righteous, and in what sense it shall be well with them, or, they shall be happy. It is the more needful to consider carefully this important distinguishing character, because men are apt to run into mistakes concerning it, to place it in things wherein it doth not at all consist, at least which are very remote from its essence. Not but that the notions of right and wrong, or moral good and evil, are obvious to the human mind, and their difference easily discerned; the ideas of sensible qualities are

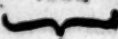
not

not more clear and distinct: But in this **SERM.**
mixed state, when men are neither perfectly **XI.**
good nor bad, the exact boundaries are not
so easily fixed, especially when an applica-
tion is made of these characters to particular
persons, and we judge concerning ourselves,
in which case prejudice and self-partiality
often mislead men; and superstition, a very
prevailing evil among mankind, contributes
to these errors, by leading them to imagine,
that there is righteousness and religion in
those things, which have really nothing to
do with it.

In general the righteous is *he*, in whose
heart the morally good or pious, virtuous
and pure affections rule, and whose practice
is habitually conducted by their direction;
the man who loves God above all things
with his *heart and soul*, who *fears him*
and *eschews evil*, whom no allurements of
worldly pleasure, profit, or honour, no fear
of worldly loss or suffering, can persuade to
desert his duty, to act against his conscience,
or wilfully and deliberately to transgress any
divine law known to him: Not the person
who is altogether free from any infirmities,
which, strictly speaking, may be called sin-
ful, and who never, through the whole
S 2 course

SERM. course of his life, has by ignorance or surprise been drawn into those indeliberate actions, which upon a review he cannot justify. If this were the sense of righteousness, who could pretend to it? For *there is not a just man that liveth upon the earth and sinneth not*. But it has pleased God graciously to accept of men upon lower terms, even upon the terms of sincerity, upon a predominant inclination and purpose of heart to do his will, appearing by the fruits of piety, temperance, justice, and charity, habitually in their lives.

These are the righteous with whom it shall be well, for they are the objects of God's approbation and favour, according to the settled unalterable rule of proceeding in his moral government. It is true, this is particularly and very expressly taught in the sacred scriptures: The prophets with one consent declare, that the upright man, though not wholly free from moral defects, pleases God; and they preach the doctrine of repentance, promising in God's name the remission of all their sins to such as sincerely comply with it, or, *that if the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, the Lord will have mercy*

on him, and abundantly pardon him; and SERM.
who doth not know, that the same is still XI.
more clearly taught in the new testament: 
But it is also perfectly agreeable to our natural sentiments concerning the Deity; what hope could men have towards him, if it were not so, and how insignificant would religion be to its main professed ends?

If this be the true notion of the righteous man, a character concerning which every one is the best judge for himself, being conscious of the operations of his own mind, and of the affections, the principles, and motives from which he acts; and indeed, as the apostle *John* teaches us, when we can assure our hearts before God, and they do not reproach us for insincerity, or prevailing evil affections, then we have confidence towards him; but, I say, if this be the true notion of the righteous man, our next enquiry under this head, is, in what sense it shall be well with him. The meaning certainly is not, that he shall possess all external advantages and enjoyments in this world, whereby his condition shall be rendered more easy and prosperous than that of the wicked. That is contrary to fact and experience, as well as to many plain decla-

SERMON. rations of scripture : It is not thus that God
 XI. distinguishes his favourites, nor do righteous
 men place their happiness in outward prosperity. *There be many that say, who will shew us any good?* That incessantly, and with the greatest eagerness pursue sensual and earthly gratifications as their chief good, which, because they cannot find in any one object (for no one object of that sort can content the mind of man) therefore they seek it in a variety, and the end of their wishes is still undetermined : But the stable uniform desire of the good man, is, that *God may lift on him the light of his countenance*, or grant him his favour, which is better than life. Nor is it to be thought, that divine providence will always interpose to rescue the righteous from those calamities that come upon the world of the ungodly in which they live; it was not the intention of the prophet to assure them, that they should be preserved from the ruin of *Jerusalem*, and the common fall of *Judah*, which was to be expected because of their crying national sins, in which the righteous had no share; but that in all events they should be happy, even though they were involved in the common desolation, and perished with the multitude of sinners;

sinners; for the judgments of God procured by the wickedness of men, do not always separate between the precious and the vile, but he suffers them frequently to fall together; still however, even in death itself, making a great and important difference between them. It is true, there are some instances of providence interposing for the deliverance of eminently good men from common destructive plagues: Thus *Noah* and his family escaped that flood which overthrew the foundations of the wicked; and righteous *Lot* was delivered from that vengeance of eternal fire, as the apostle calls it, which consumed *Sodom* and *Gemorrhah*. Such instructive examples shew, that God has not forsaken the earth, that his eye runs to and fro to mark the perfect, and shew himself strong in behalf of the upright; and they are imperfect sketches of his just administration, which will finally distinguish men according to their doings with the most exact equity; but they are rare examples; the ordinary course of things is otherwise, and as far as relates to the outward state of men in this world, there is one event to the righteous and to the sinner.

SERM.

We must therefore, in order to under-

XI.

stand fully how it shall be well with the righteous, enlarge our notion of the state of man; we must consider him in the whole of his being, his soul as well as his body, and in every condition and period of his existence. It is thus we judge concerning our state within the compass of the present life, and its affairs: A man may be easy and prosperous in the main, when his principal interests are flourishing, although he meets with various disappointments in things which are of lesser moment. In like manner we may justly say, it is well with good men when their souls prosper; they enjoy inward peace and satisfaction, and their future happiness is secured, though they are liable to sufferings in this present time, which, as the apostle * says, *are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall hereafter be revealed in them*; and though they are not exempted from the common frailties, nor the extraordinary distresses which are incident to the rest of mankind, and the societies they belong to. The pleasure, the high self-enjoyment which arises from a consciousness

* Rom. viii. 18.

of virtuous integrity, together with a firm SERM.
unshaken confidence in God, the joyful ex- **XI,**
pectation of a future more perfect happi-
ness, and the sure possession of it when this
life is ended; these are the portions of sin-
cere persevering righteousness; for, as this
prophet elsewhere teaches, chapter xxxii.

*17. the work of righteousness shall be peace,
and the effect of it quietness and assurance
for ever.* This is more fully and particu-
larly explained to us in the scripture. God
has brought life and immortality to clear light
through the Gospel, and by his spirit revealed,
as St. Paul teaches *1 Corinthians, xi. 9*
those things which he has prepared for them
that love him; things which eye hath not
seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into
the heart of man to conceive. But at all
times, and under every dispensation of reli-
gion, there has been still sufficient reason to
believe that it shall be well with the righte-
ous, or that there is an established insepara-
ble connection between virtue and happi-
ness, which leads me to what I propos'd.

Secondly, to shew the truth of the pro-
phet's assertion in the text, that it shall be
well with the righteous, or that he shall be
happy: Whatever becomes of the society
he

SERM. he belongs to, whatever miseries may befall
 XL his fellow-citizens or countrymen; and whatever outward calamities he may be involv'd in jointly with them, there is real good reserved for him, and he shall be happy in proportion to the degree of his righteousness. And here, as I have stated the notion of that happiness which is consequent upon virtue only in general, without descending to those particular blessings and enjoyments, which christians either know by experience, or are taught to hope for by the revealed rule of their religion, so I shall begin the proof of the doctrine, with that evidence which is common to mankind, and must appear to every person who carefully attends to it. Let us then, first of all, consider the state and constitution of the human nature as in fact we find it, abstracting from any inquiry concerning the author of it, and his designs and conduct towards us. Every ones experience makes him sensible of pleasure and pain, or of happiness and misery, of both which we all of us partake in some degree. It is almost as plain, that both enjoyments and sufferings are of different kinds; and the most general and important distinction is into *mental* and *bodily*. Who doth
 not

not know, or cannot compare in his own SERM.
reflecting thoughts, the difference between XI.
the gratifications and uneasinesses of the ex-
ternal senses, and of the mind? But it is too
little attended to, and yet very certain, that
the latter are of vastly greater importance to
our interest than the former. Scarcely is
there any man not conscious, in some mea-
sure, of the satisfaction which arises from
morally good dispositions, at least some par-
ticular kinds of them, such as social and
natural affection, benevolence, compassion,
or gratitude; and that this is stronger and
more intense than the enjoyments which any
sensible object can yield, appears from this
consideration, that the latter are frequently
sacrificed to the other; nay, the most
grievous bodily tortures are submitted to by
men of very imperfect moral characters,
rather than they will foregoe the pleasures
of their supposed virtue. Besides, it might
be easily shewn, that not only the enjoy-
ments of sense are mixed with some ho-
nourable appearance of virtue, which shews
the necessity the human mind is under of
paying respect to that divine form, but that
really sensual pleasure is heightened to the
possessor, by that species of morality, which
attends

SERM. attends it in his imagination, by the appear-

XI. ance of generosity, freedom, friendship, or
social communication. Who doth not
 know, on the other hand, the pains of a
 self-accusing and condemning heart? How
 abject, how mean, and odious, doth an
 immoral character appear to every one who
 discerns it, at least in an extreme degree?
 How vile, how despicable is the miser, and
 the luxurious? How much abhorred the
 cruel, the ungrateful, and perfidious? But
 how much more hateful *to himself* is the
 obstinately vicious, the impious, and the
 wickedly dishonest man, when he is forced
 to review his actions, and look into his own
 heart? He has no feeling of rational manly
 self-enjoyment; on the contrary, galling
 self-reflections and inward remorse consume
 his very vitals, make life a burden, and a
 deliverance from it earnestly wished and
 sought for. He is conscious of having de-
 served ill from all rational and moral agents,
 and is in a continual dread of a recompence
 suitable to the demerit of his crimes. Now
 let any man judge whether such a state be
 eligible; rather, whether it be not the
 worst that a rational creature is capable of
 in this world; whether, therefore, by the
 very

very frame of our nature it be not ill with SERM.
the wicked, and consequently well with XI.
the righteous. It is true in the present con-
dition of being, both the joy of a self-ap-
proving, and the torment of a self-con-
demning conscience, are in some degree
abated by the cares, the business, and amuse-
ments of life (when animal nature shall
cease, and the union of the mind with flesh
and blood shall be dissolved, they will then
be felt in a more intense degree than we can
now comprehend) but experience doth con-
vince some, and a careful attention will con-
vince every man, that the one is the greatest
felicity, and the other the greatest misery of
our nature.

The truth of what has been asserted,
is universally acknowledged in those instan-
ces, which are the most perfect in their
kind: A very eminently good man, is not
only the object of the highest veneration and
esteem to others, but believed to be the
happiest in himself; and a complete immo-
ral state is own'd to be miserable; but in
lower degrees, which are the most common
among mankind, the advantage or disadvan-
tage is not so sensibly felt, and the differ-
ence is slightly pass'd over as of little con-
sideration.

SERM. *Consideration.* If, however, the principle be true, that virtue is the good or happiness, and vice the ill or misery of every man, it must hold universally, and always in proportion. How unreasonable were it to imagine that indeed the man who is perfect in righteousness, is perfect in enjoyment, and the thoroughly wicked is the most unhappy, but that the intermediate characters between these two extremes are indifferent, with respect to enjoyment? That a sound entire mind, as to its moral state, is a great happiness, a temper wholly desolate and vicious is necessarily miserable, and yet that happiness doth not rise and fall, according to the measure of our opposite moral qualities? Let us be assured, and always keep it in mind, that whenever in any instance we depart from our integrity, we are so far hurting ourselves and acting against our own interest; and in the degree wherein we amend our temper and our ways, are ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well, increasing in virtue and abounding in the fruits of righteousness, in the same degree we are promoting our own true happiness, which doth not depend, even in this world, so much on the circumstances

stances of our outward condition, as the dispositions of our minds and our moral conduct.

This argument has been largely insisted on, and the force of it clearly seen by wise and thoughtful men, without the advantage of a revelation, even when they were uncertain concerning a future state, as some of them at all times, and probably all of them at sometimes, were: It was the foundation on which they maintained the excellence and the eligibleness of virtue, as most becoming the dignity of a rational nature, and the chief good of man, abstracting from any consideration of God's interposing, to reward and punish men according to their works. But if we take in that consideration, the strength of the argument will become irresistible, and the prophet's assertion in the text will rest, not only on the constitution and state of human nature, as we find it by observation and experience, but the evidence we have of the being, the perfections, and the moral government of God, from which it is a just consequence. We are, then, to consider righteousness not merely as the glory of the human mind, and the naturally felicitating exercise and attainment

SERM. attainment of its powers, but farther as it is

XI. approved, and recommended to mankind; by the Deity, their rightful and supreme ruler. That there is an intelligent and good author of nature, all his works proclaim; and that he has manifested his will and some of his designs in his works of creation and providence to his rational creatures, thereby to direct them in the course of their voluntary actions, is also very evident. For as we cannot but conclude in general what he intended by the relations, dependency, and order of things. For instance, to what end the sun and the earth were placed in such a situation, with respect to each other as they are; that the earth affording such a variety of conveniencies for animals was design'd for their habitation; we know by considering the uses of the several parts in our animal frame, what nature, that is, the author of nature form'd them for; that eyes were made for seeing, feet for walking, and hands to be instruments for action; so since, in particular, it appears that we are creatures capable of various pleasure and pain, in consequence of our own voluntary actions, and we can foresee the consequence, it is not with any pretence of reason to be doubted, but the wise and good author of nature design'd,

sign'd, hereby that the course of our actions SERM.
 shou'd be so directed, as we might pro- XI.
 mote our own happiness and avoid misery.

Now this is as evidently true, with respect to moral actions, and the consequences of them, as any other; we know their difference as clearly, and are as free in our choice, we are as certain, too, of the event of the connection between virtue and happiness, between wickedness and misery; from whence it plainly follows, that God design'd by this constitution and state of things wherein we are placed, that we should choose what is morally good, and refuse the evil; in other words, that we are under a moral law, and God is our moral governor, or that he has declared his will concerning our conduct, and given us a rule of action, enforced by a sanction, or by rewards and punishments, annexed to the observance of it, and our disobedience to it, which should determine our behaviour as rational creatures.

Hence arises a consideration of great weight; not only we find by experience, in the ordinary course of things, that it is well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked; or, that there is in fact a connection between

SERM. virtue and happiness, and between vice and

XI. misery; but it is so established by the sovereign will of the great law-giver, whose power none can resist. We have the clearest evidence that he approves the good actions of men, and disapproves the bad; whence we infer that one part of his own character is moral rectitude, which is a perfection that necessarily appears to our minds amiable, and every way worthy of the most excellent nature; and since he is our natural governor, by whose will we exist, are preserv'd, and all the circumstances of our condition are determined, here is a sufficient intimation of the rule, according to which he doth, and will always proceed, in his dispensations towards us, making us happy or unhappy. This being suppos'd as a certain principle, let us see how it is to be applied to the present state of things, and what consequences follow from it. The administration of providence in this world has a contrary appearance, for it seems to be promiscuous: As *Solomon* speaks, *all things come alike to all, none knows either love or hatred*; that is, the favour or displeasure of God, *by all that is before him*, by the events which happen

to men in the ordinary course of the world, SERM.
which makes the point we are now con- XI.
sidering appear doubtful; and great multi-
tudes of mankind seem not to believe it; at
least, it has not that influence on their dis-
positions and their lives, which a principle
of such importance seriously believed and
attended to might be expected to have. The
true answer to this difficulty, is, that though
God be a ruler perfectly righteous, who
most certainly will distribute rewards and
punishments to his reasonable creatures, ac-
cording to their works, yet in this he acts
freely and with perfect wisdom; not ne-
cessarily at all times, and in every dispensa-
tion towards them, making the difference
among them which is to be made finally
and in the whole, but choosing the manner
and the time for his righteous distribution,
which to his infinite understanding appears
the most proper: And that we now appear
plainly to be in a state of discipline, where-
in one part of our appointed trial arises
from the imperfection of our know-
ledge, concerning the event of virtue
and vice in our practice. It pleases God
now to leave the obligations of virtue more
imperfect, and the motives to it less over-
bearing

SER M. bearing than they might be, or may be in
 XI. another state, but yet they are sufficient,
 especially since he has given us satisfying
 evidence of his own moral perfections and
 his moral government, though they do not
 shine out in their full splendor.

The true consequence therefore from the
 promiscuous administration in the present
 state, so far as it is promiscuous, is not that
 it shall be so throughout; but quite on the
 contrary, that the less manifestly it appears
 now to be well with the righteous, the
 more manifest it shall be hereafter: for, if
 the government of the rational creation be
 moral, and the ends of it must be obtained,
 it follows that they who sincerely adhere to
 the cause of virtue, must in proportion be
 happy, not perfectly and apparently in
 every circumstance and condition of their
 being, for that the divine wisdom and rec-
 titude do not require, but in the whole:
 When, and where, and in what manner
 are points which our unfinished reason doth
 not reach to. Here the scripture instructs
 us more particularly, assuring us that *the*
latter end of the perfect and upright man is
peace; that the dead are blessed who die in
the Lord; that God has appointed a day in
which

which he will judge the world in righteousness SERM.
by Jesus Christ, who will be glorified in his **XI.**
saints, will give them crowns of life and
glory, and shall take vengeance on them that
know not God, and obey not the gospel.

If we sincerely believe the christian religion, it is impossible to disbelieve this article, which lies at the very foundation of it; indeed it may justly be called the foundation of all religion, which is nothing else but the practice of virtue out of respect to the Deity, or from a sincere perswasion and acknowledgement of his Being, his moral perfections, and moral government, or his providence ruling the world in righteousness; nay, virtue itself, in the most abstract way of considering it, however amiable it may appear to the human mind, is left naked and destitute of its greatest security, unless we be convinced of its connection with happiness, and that it shall be well with the righteous. But still this principle, as clear as it is and important, confirm'd by the concurring evidence of reason and revelation, and so nearly affecting the highest interest of every man in particular, has not that influence and effect on the minds and the practice of men which it ought to have. Whence

SERM. doth this arise? Certainly from inattention,

XI. from the influence of particular affections,
 passions, and habits. There is nothing more
 unaccountable in the state of human nature,
 and the conduct of its powers, than that
 men should be determined to act against the
 conviction of their minds, and that the
 lower springs of action should prevail against
 those which are acknowledged to be superior.
 This is our infirmity, but it is not remedi-
 less; and the remedy is in ourselves: By a
 vigorous careful attention, and strong reso-
 lution, which our hearts will tell us are in
 our power, our contracted and even natu-
 ral weaknesses may be cured; but if we will
 not shew ourselves men, we choose our
 own destruction, and perish like fools. How-
 ever, if *the filthy will be filthy* still, let the
righteous be righteous still, assured that it
 shall be well with him.

S E R-

SERMON XII.

The Path of the Just, like the
shining Light.

Proverbs iv. 18.

*But the path of the just, is as the shining
light, that shineth more and more, unto
the perfect day.*

IN this book *Solomon* recommends religious virtue to our affectionate esteem, to our choice and constant pursuit, by the character of wisdom; a character which if it be justly applied, should render it highly amiable to mankind; for what can be more agreeable to an intelligent nature, than the proper use, and the best improvement of understanding? Indeed, if we fix our thoughts attentively in the contemplation of this excellent object, we cannot miss of discerning its beauty; it shines by its own native splendor, and must strike every rational being with a sense of glory and dignity,

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SERM. XII. which

SERM. which is no where else to be seen. Every

XII. thing under the sun, when set against it, is but low in comparison; the most finished beauties of corporal nature are empty shadows; for it is in reality reason itself in its highest exaltation. But we must make a difference between the abstracted idea of virtue or wisdom, and the practice of it in human life. The one is truly a divine form; for moral rectitude and goodness is the glory of God himself, and in him it is a transcendent excellence, which is the object of our highest admiration and love, though we cannot form adequate conceptions of it. The other virtue, as exemplified in human characters, is a faint image, shaded not only with intellectual imperfections, as it is in all finite beings, whereby they come infinitely short of absolute wisdom and original holiness, but with moral defects in our present state; for *there is not a just man that liveth upon the earth and sinneth not*, who has not some remaining weakness, whereby he is in danger of being drawn away into evil and folly. And yet imperfect as it is, virtue makes an important difference among men, a difference between their characters, and a difference between their conditions.

The

The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour; he is wiser, he is better, and he is happier, and in the end he shall appear much more distinguished in all these respects. SERM. XII.

The text represents virtue in this imperfect view, as practised by weak and frail mortals, and therefore as far below that consummate moral excellence, which shines in some finite beings, not to speak of the supreme; nay, far below what our own nature is capable of, and what the spirits of just men made perfect have actually attained. Our goodness here, the goodness of the sincere, is not like the *morning cloud that passeth away*, but it is like the morning dawn which is weak in its beginning, but gradually increases in brightness, till it arises to its meridian glory. The path of the just, even the imperfectly just, has a real, substantial excellence whereby it is essentially distinguished from the path of the wicked; they differ as light and darkness, which are the most opposite to each other, and their difference is a common proverbial description of things most directly contrary, which can never be reconciled or consist together, and which in their kinds and qualities set against each other, are the best and the worst, at least,

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very

SERM. very good and extremely bad. Thus Solomon
XII. here speaks concerning the path of the just
 and the wicked; the former, he says in the
 text, is as *the shining light*; and in the
 verse immediately following, *the way of the
 wicked is as darkness.*

My intention in this discourse is to consider the beauty, dignity, and excellence of religious virtue in human characters and actions, not only in general, but in the differences of its state, and the various steps of its progress, from its weak imperfect beginnings to its consummation. It is *like the shining light that shineth more and more to the perfect day.* It is not necessary to describe the path of the just; it is nothing else but the practice of virtue, of moral piety, of righteousness, of temperance, and charity, which I suppose so far universally known, as to make the encomium Solomon gives it, that it is *as the shining light*, easily intelligible. Only let it be observed, that the whole of virtue is comprehended, and every essential branch of it must be reduced to practice in the path of the just. Philosophy itself determines, and it is plain to every one who attentively considers it, that the virtues are inseparable; at least, that no character can be
 eminent

eminent for any one of them, which is de- SERM.
stitute of the rest. *Rigid justice* will dege- XII.
nerate into cruelty, if it is not accompanied
with *beneficence*; and to both these, that
they may shine in any character constantly
and uniformly, must necessarily be added
temperance, or a steady self-dominion, a due
government over the appetites and passions:
But in such a state as that of the world is,
full of temptations, both blandishments and
terrors, none of all the virtues which have
been named, can subsist without *fortitude*,
a firm inviolable resolution of cleaving to
what appears right and good, whatever
difficulties and dangers may attend it: And,
lastly, as all these are the qualities, the works,
or rational exercises of intelligent Beings,
not the result of mere instinct, but of calm
reflection; and, especially, as great regard
is to be had in them to a variety of external
circumstances, they must all of them be
conducted with *prudence*. But to us chris-
tians the case is exceeding plain by the rule
of our religion, which is delivered in the
form of a law, containing short and plain
precepts enforced by proper sanctions, and
other motives. Will you meet with one
declaration in the bible which authorises you
to

SERM, to detach a single virtue, or a few, from the
 XII. body, the system of virtues, and to make it
 or those few the whole of your religion,
 sufficient to denominate you true christians,
 to satisfy the demand of your profession,
 and entitle you to the rewards of christiani-
 ty? No, the contrary is indeed exceedingly
 clear, not one good moral quality or good
 work is omitted or left, out of the religious
 character, or *the path of the just*, as it is
 described in the word of God; but every
 branch of our duty to God, our fellow
 creatures and ourselves, is frequently incul-
 cated, and strongly enforced. Sometimes
 we have the whole of our duty thrown to-
 gether in short and beautiful descriptions;
 the *high way of holiness*, as the prophet *
Isaiah calls it, exactly delineated; and every
 road, that is, each particular virtue in the
path of the just marked out to us. Thus
 we are told, that what God requires of us, is
 to *do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk*
humbly with God ||. And St + *Paul* says,
 that *the grace which hath appeared bringing*
salvation, teaches us to live soberly, and righ-
teously, and godly, in this present world. Will

you

* Is. xxxv, 8. || Mic. vi. 8. 3 + Tit. ii. 12.

you then imagine, that to be just in your dealings with mankind, is sufficient to make you the true disciples of Jesus Christ, and give you confidence towards him, when he shall come to judge the world, while you indulge yourselves in some secret vices, contrary to sobriety? Or, that freedom from these, in conjunction with the other, will be sufficient, while the necessary offices of moral piety are neglected? or will you on the other hand think that to be devout, to abound in the instituted services of religion, is enough to the purposes of christianity, while you are unrighteous and uncharitable? No; this is not to be christians, this is not *the path of the just*, for it comprehends all the parts of our duty. See what the apostle St. James says expressly in the second chapter of his epistle, and 10th verse: *Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point (habitually, or wilfully and deliberately) he is guilty of all.*

Having made this remark, which I thought necessary, to give us a true idea of the path of the just, that is, of religious virtue, as it is exemplified in human characters, or, as it is reduced to practice by men having infirmity, which, tho' it be imperfect,

SERM. imperfect, yet must be sincere; and in order to that universal, I shall now proceed to consider the doctrine of the text, that this *path of the Just*, a life of holiness, filled with the fruits of righteousness, mercy, and godliness, so far as these virtues may be attained in this world, nay, so far as they are actually attained by every good man; that this, I say, *is a shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day*. The expression immediately raises in our minds the idea of excellent, regular, and lovely, for all these characters are obviously imported in shining light, set in opposition to darkness, which is naturally the image of confusion and horror; but we must keep in our thoughts the nature of the subject to which the allusion is applied, it is a rational, not a sensible light, a spiritual, not a corporeal splendor. The first thing therefore which occurs, as imported in the figure, is, that the way or the life of the just morally considered, comprehending his temper and his conduct, the whole tenor of his deliberate designs, and the course of his actions, is a regular scheme formed according to one model, and under one uniform direction: One principle animates the whole,
one

one rule guides all its movements, and one great end is constantly pursued in it. Light shows every thing truly as it is; a man walking in it, sees his way and the end of it; he is enabled to pursue his aim steadily, keeping it always in view; he knows how to choose his steps without turning aside, and to avoid dangers: Like this is the principle of virtue in the heart directing the conversation; it is always the same unvarying guide, admirable for its simplicity, without a mixture of interfering counsels, without a diversity of inconsistent views; it leads us on to the one end of faith and of all religion, the salvation of the soul, which is nothing else but what my text calls the *perfect day*, or the perfection of virtue itself. Whatever diversity there is in the way, that is, in the practice of religion, as it has been described, containing righteousness, piety, temperance and charity, yet not only the end is the same, but the spring of action, the one principle of faith working by love, the love of God and of mankind. Under the influence of this great animating spring, the *good work* of God proceeds uniformly to its perfection; the divine nature, as St. *Peter* calls it, holds on its regular course,

SERM. course, having all the active powers of the
XII. human nature in subjection to it, with the
full consent of approving reason, and applauding conscience, the *candle of the Lord*. But how unlike this is the way of the wicked, which *Solomon* justly calls darkness; vain thoughts, foolish and hurtful lusts, blinding the understanding and corrupting the heart, produce nothing but wild disorder. No one end is steadily pursued, no governing principle adhered to; but jarring passions are its unequal guide, by which the unhappy person under their power is furiously hurried not knowing whither, sometimes to the pursuit of tumultuous brutal pleasures, of perishing earthly riches, which moth and rust corrupt, and thieves break through and steal; or of fading honours, according as the *lust of the flesh*, the *lust of the eyes*, or the *pride of life*, happen to have the ascendant; sometimes into imaginary scenes of danger, and even into black despair, when distracting fear prevails, or the *sorrow of the world, which worketh death*; sometimes again into outrageous madness, or meditated mischief, when wrath and revenge are predominant; and all these blind guides in their turns rule the way of the wicked,

wicked, which therefore is, according to **SERM.**

another elegant scripture comparifon, *like* **XII.**

the troubled sea that cannot rest, but is in perpetual confusion, driven by the winds, and tossed. Our passions, especially when

strengthened by indulgence, and confirmed by evil habits, bring the mind into an unhappy state of ignorance, and leave the moral conduct under no proper direction; which our saviour, agreeably to the figure in my text, excellently represents by the allusion of an evil eye, *Matthew vi. 22, 23. The light of the body is the eye, if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light: But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness; if therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!* As the vitiated organ of sight is dangerous to the body, leaving a man without any just direction how to walk safely, and to shun snares and precipices, so the judgment of the mind concerning moral differences, or whatever is necessary and of the utmost importance to human happiness, being corrupted and misled by lust and passion, is in deplorable darkness, not knowing

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Isaiah lviii. 20.

SERM. at all how to guide its way, or how to escape
 XII. its ruin, as *Solomon* says in the place already
 referred to, verse 19, of this chapter; *the way of the wicked is as darkness, they know not at what they stumble.* And elsewhere, *the * prudent man foreseeth evil and hideth himself, but the simple pass on and are punished.* They precipitate themselves into destruction, not discerning, or not determined by the most obvious truths concerning the necessary unalterable distinction of moral good and evil, and the most certain opposite consequences of them, happiness and misery; so infatuated are they by their vices, and hardened thro' the deceitfulness of sin.

Secondly, As the path of the just shines with intellectual light, illuminated with knowledge, and conducted with wisdom, and therefore a consistent regular scheme; so it is accompanied with inward serenity and satisfaction. *Solomon* observes, *Ecclesiastes xi. 7. That truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.* It is not only itself a very agreeable object, but it shows us the beauties of the world about us, and human life depriv'd of that

* Prov. xxii. 3.

that entertainment, is rendered very uncomfortable ; so is the knowledge of religious wisdom to the sincerely virtuous mind, and the righteous goes on his way rejoicing, for ** great peace have they who love God's law, nothing shall offend them.* The † ways of wisdom are found to be *ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.* They are a delightful object of the mind's contemplation ; but when they are reduced to practice, and the life is regulated by them, it is accompanied with an uninterrupted series of flowing pleasures, a pure, a rational, and solid joy, which nothing else in the whole compass of human life and affairs can yield. Not only so, the principles of religion planted in the heart, and diffusing their influence thro' the whole scheme of life, set every thing about us in a fair and amiable light. To an unlightened mind the world appears full of disorder ; puzzling difficulties arise upon every subject it can turn its thoughts to, how to reconcile the appearances of nature to ruling intelligence, and the events of time, particularly in the condition of mankind, to a wise, a righteous, and good administration : These are points too high for

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the

* Psa. cxix. 165.

† Prov. iii. 17.

SERM. the natural man, as St. Paul calls him, that
 XII. is, the carnal, the vicious man, to under-
 stand; and his ignorance renders the works
 of God joyless to him, nay, fills his mind
 with distracting perplexity. But *knowledge*
is easy to him that understandeth, as Solomon
 speaks, *Proverbs* xiv. 6. pious sentiments
 deeply impress'd on the soul, and virtue be-
 come its very temper, give such a sense of
 worth, and of excellence and wisdom, in
 the frame of nature still conducting its ad-
 ministration, that all these doubts vanish; the
 world puts on a smiling countenance; every
 thing in it appears lovely as the creatures
 of God, every event as his wise appoint-
 ment; afflictions are gentle and easy chas-
 tisements intended for good, death itself is
 stripped of its terrors, and therefore amidst all
 the mazes of life, and the intricacies of
 providence in the whole of its government,
 which is to us inexplicable, the mind
 conscious of integrity, and satisfied from
 itself, enjoys its own existence, nay, in
 some sense, enjoys all things with comfort;
 is well pleas'd with the world, as under the
 oeconomy of its heavenly father, who is in
 the wisest manner carrying on his own good
 designs;

designs; and is easy in the situation he hath appointed for it. SERM.
XII.

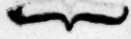
Thirdly, The path of the just does not only shine clearly inwards, not only it is a luminous path in itself, it also sends light abroad, that is, communicates profitable instruction to, and hath an useful influence on those who have the opportunity of observing it. Our Saviour recommends it to his apostles, and the same in their measure and proportion, is also the duty of all his other followers, to let *their * light shine before men, that they may see their good works, and glorify their father who is in heaven.* That is, to make the sincerity and the power of virtuous principles, conspicuous in their exemplary conversations, that the attention of those who should see them, might be engaged to true religion, and they might by that means be induced to believe, to profess, and practise it, to the glory of God, in the advancement of his kingdom of righteousness, and peace over his intelligent creatures. Next to extraordinary divine interposition by messengers commission'd from heaven to teach it, perhaps there is not any thing which has contributed so much to the preserving and

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* Matt. v. 16.

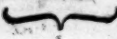
SERM. propagating religion in the world, as the

XII.  examples of good men; and indeed they have a plain natural tendency to this purpose, not only by giving a just notion of that excellent practical science or discipline, which is better understood, and makes a stronger impression when it is represented in life and action, than by any description or abstract reasoning; but farther, they shew that religious virtue, as sublime as it is, yet is not so far raised above the condition of frail humanity, as to be quite impracticable in our present state. When we hear of hardy temperance, of humble and fervent devotion, of inflexible justice, and laborious charity, we are apt to think these are beautiful ideas indeed, but they go little farther than the imagination, they do not enter into the heart, nor animate our resolutions; but when we see the same virtues actually practis'd by men of like passions with ourselves, and who are liable to the same temptations, the light strikes us with greater force, and inspires with a desire of imitation. Some rare instances there were of eminent virtue in the heathen world, who cast a small glimmering light into that region of darkness, at least, if they made very few converts, they obtained

tained great reputation, and their names ^{SPRM.} have been handed down with honour to ^{XII.}

succeeding generations: But the most fruitful seminary for propagating religious knowledge, has been the school of Christ; it is according to his own comparison, *Matt. v. 14. a city seated on a hill, conspicuous from afar, and a candle not put under a bushel, but in a candlestick*, the most convenient situation for spreading its light abroad. It is certain, christianity has produced the brightest patterns of extraordinary virtue, and the greatest number of them. After our great master himself, the true light of the world, whose character is absolutely without a parallel, and ever will be among mankind, many of his disciples form'd upon his model, were very illustrious examples of all goodness, by the innocence of their lives, their inviolable integrity, the purity and simplicity of their manners, their heroic charity, and invincible patience under sufferings, leaving strong convictions of a reality and excellence in religion, upon the minds of very corrupt men, even of their persecuters; becoming likewise the successful instruments of converting multitudes from the errors of their way. Thus I have

SERM. shown you that the path of the just, or re-

XII. ligious virtue exemplified in human characters, or as practised by men having infirmity, is as a shining light; it is in itself excellent, beautiful and regular, uniformly conducted with wisdom; and free from that obscurity, ignorance and confusion, which are inseparable characters of a wicked and vicious course; it is accompanied with a constant inward serenity and self-approving joy, and it conveys useful instructions to those who behold it.

I shall, in the next place, consider it as an increasing light, and advancing to perfection, which the text plainly leads us to; for the path of the just is said to be a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. It is not like a fiery meteor which, having no abiding cause of light, only makes a blaze, and is extinguish'd, nor does it shine only by reflection with a borrow'd lustre, but like the spring of day animated by an inward undecaying principle, it rises in splendor from its low and more obscure beginnings, going on gradually to perfection. Like the natural early dawn, in this respect, is the principle of virtue, or what the scripture calls the *seed*

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of God, and the new creature; it is weak, but it is entire and permament, naturally growing up to maturity. We shall be convinced it must be so if we attend to the constitution of our own minds; for the intellectual and moral, indeed all the active powers of the human nature, are weak and narrow at first; they enlarge by degrees, they acquire strength by exercise, and are improv'd by habits; every ones experience will satisfy him in this, who reflects on his own progress in knowledge, and in all the qualities which render life either agreeable or useful. What a poor unfinished, unadorn'd, and insipid thing, is the life of man in infancy, though indued with all the capacities which belong to its kind, till observation and use have form'd it to the prosecution and attainment of its proper ends? Religion must in this respect be like all other improvements of nature, which depend on the exercise of our own powers; nay, it is so more peculiarly, because it depends more upon ourselves, and requires a more serious and attentive reflection and care, than many other improveable qualities or sciences, which we can attain: It differs therefore so far from the visible light, which necessarily

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SERM. necessarily shines more and more to the perfect day. The path of the just, tho' naturally capable of growth, and made for it, does not actually grow without the voluntary and vigorous exertion of its inward active powers; every good man knows, for he is conscious of it, the progress of virtue in himself, the dexterity, the ease and pleasure, which attend the practice of it in proportion as he makes it his earnest study, and the object of his constant and careful application; as on the contrary, by indolence and sloth, darkness grows upon us, and indisposition of mind; our inward satisfaction decays, and usefulness in the world to the glory of our heavenly father, and the good of mankind, by promoting the cause of truth and virtue. 'Tis thus that the scripture represents the religious state, as by the divine ordination concerning it, and the law of its nature, progressive. It is compared to the vegetable, and to the animal life, which from a very weak and low beginning, grows up to its appointed perfection, to its beauty and fruitfulness; and the sensitive kind to the full use of its powers and its enjoyment. The similitude of a man, growing up from infancy to mature age, is a very familiar one, in
describing

describing the progressive condition of christians; and they are distinguished according to the measure of their advancement into

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babes and perfect men, by the apostle *Paul*. And *St. John* makes three stages of the spiritual life, *little * children, young men, and fathers*. But still, it is evident that this progress depends upon ourselves: It is enjoined as our duty; recommended by the best examples, and we are encouraged to it by the promise of an ample reward, in proportion to the measure of our zeal, diligence and proficiency during our being in a state of discipline. We are exhorted to † *grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*; to add still to the measure of our virtue, and multiply our fruits of righteousness more and more, which is shining more and more in the sense of the text. *St. Paul* proposes himself as a pattern for our imitation, when sensible of his not having attained, neither being already perfect, ‡ *leaving the things which were behind, and reaching forth to the things which were before, he press'd towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*, and we are taught that in exact proportion to

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* 1 John ii. 12, 13. † 2 Pet. iii. 18. ‡ Phil. iii. 13.

SERM. the measure of shining, not apparent, but
 XII. real genuine virtue here, so shall the future
 felicity be; *he that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully* *.

But there is an appointed standard of virtue, towards which we should always aspire, which is its most complete state, represented here under the notion of the *perfect day*. I do not mean that there is a precise limit set to intellectual and moral attainments, and pleasures, beyond which they cannot pass, even in the future state; the inequality of the heavenly glory, plainly declared in scripture, and compared to the unequal brightness of the firmament, and of particular sparkling stars in it, or luminous ones, and to the difference between the stars themselves; this, I say, leads us rather to suppose the contrary: And, indeed, our rational nature and powers, infinitely short of absolute perfection, seem by their constitution to be always capable of progress: But what I mean, is, that there is a perfect day to come, a state so far of consummate virtue and righteousness, as to be free of all moral blemishes, and to exclude all sinful failures,

* 2 Cor. ix. 6.

failures, not fully understood by us (*for eye* SERM.
bath * *not seen, nor ear heard, nor have* XII.
entered into the heart of man, the things
which God hath prepared for them that love
him) which at present terminates all our
wishes and aims. We have but general and
weak notions of what may be hop'd for
beyond it; and every good man painfully
reflecting on the infirmities which now
cleave to him, rests with contentment and
joy in the happy prospect of that exalted
condition, in which he shall be wholly free
from sin, and from temptations to it; the
devout and virtuous affections shall have
their full scope, and no more be controuled
or restrained in their exercise by inferior
appetites and passions. This may well be
called the *perfect day*, when set against the
weakness, the obscurity, and the discomfort
of our state in this world. To it we should
always aspire with a noble ardor of mind,
and to it our feeble virtue tends; every
vigorous step, however, we take, brings
nearer to it, and also is accompanied with a
present reward in the increase and confir-
mation of good habits themselves, which
really is a substantial happiness, and with

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* 1 Cor. ii. 9.

SERM. a growing satisfaction. The apostle teaches
 XII. in 2 *Corinthians* iii. 18. that our progress
 in true religion, which he calls the image
 of God, is *from glory to glory*, every step
 we advance in it tends to enoble and dignify
 our nature, and brings an addition of true
 enjoyment.

The conclusion, is, that we should engage our hearts to the love, the study, and the practice of virtue. Her own native charms are sufficient to allure every rational being. They must be the most despicable kind of living creatures, and have the least relish of life, who shun the light of Day, and choose rather to dwell in darkness. How degenerate are those minds? Are they worthy to be called intelligent, who do not discern the beauty of holiness, and have no taste for the pleasure of religious wisdom? Yet so corrupt, so infatuated are multitudes of mankind, so lost to a just sense of the true dignity and glory of their nature; even profess'd christians, many of them, have contracted this insensibility, above all others unexcusable, because God has held out a clear light from heaven to guide them in the way of righteousness; he has mark'd out the shining path of the just, display'd the progress

progress of it in all its beauty, and shewed S E R M.
that it ends in a perfect day. But this is XII.
the condemnation of men, hardened thro'
the deceitfulness of sin into obstinate unbelief, *that they loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.* But let us remember, it is not enough once to have seen the excellence of religious wisdom, to have profess'd ourselves her votaries, and that we have an affection for her, (the sincerity of which can no otherwise be prov'd than by perseverance and growing in it, and we shall dishonour her more by turning away from the holy commandment, than if we had never known the way of righteousness) they only who endure to the end shall be saved; and it is *by a patient continuance in well doing, that we are to seek for glory, honour, and immortality, so as to obtain eternal life.*

The End of the FIRST VOLUME.

regards of it is all in vain, and answered a m.
that it ends in a perfect day. But this is
XII.

the termination of the present day
the object of the present day
that it is not enough to have
the existence of religious duties, to have
prohibited ourselves from sinning, and that we
have our attention for duty (the faculty of
which can no otherwise be improved than by
practising it, and we
shall discover that the way of turning away
from the holy commandment, then in we
shall see at its own the way of righteousness)
that only by turning to the end shall we
find it, and it is a common testimony in all
ages that we are in duty, but that
and that it is a common testimony in all
ages that we are in duty, but that

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